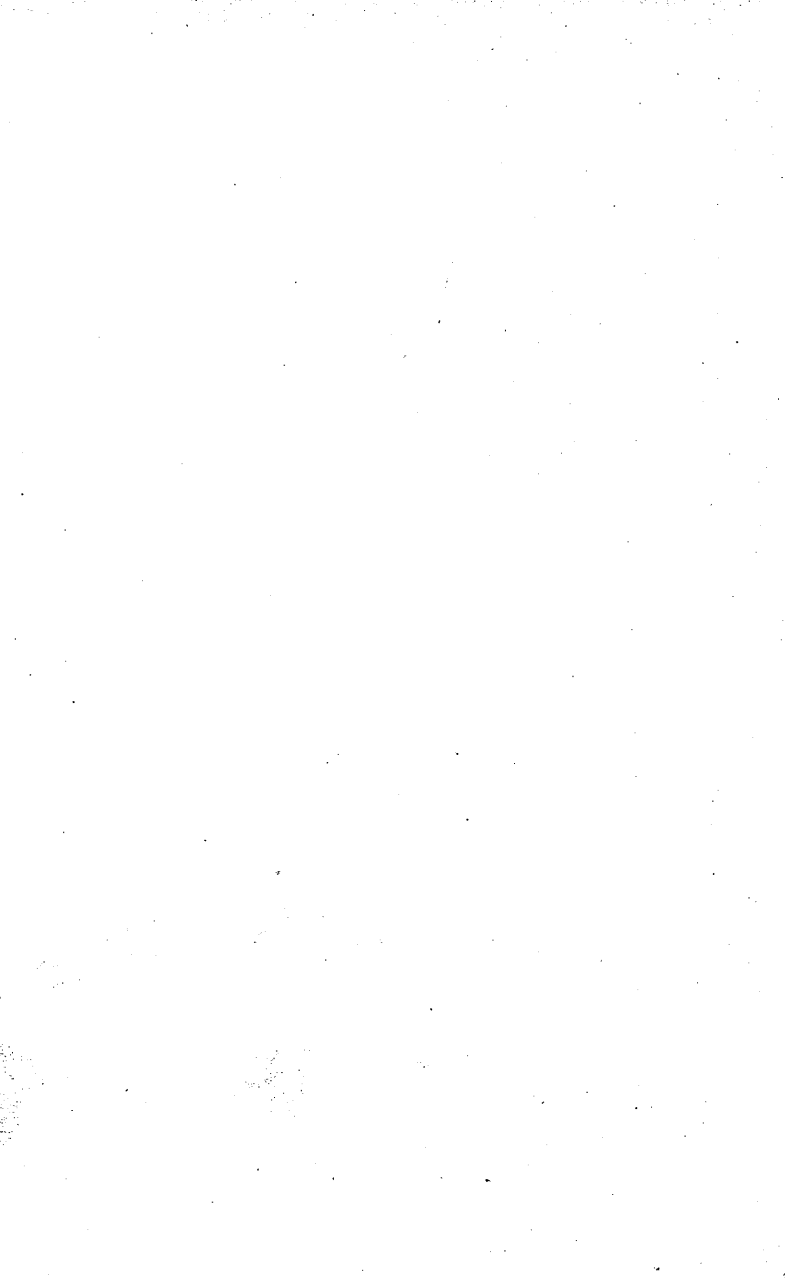




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DOWN GRADE;

A BOOK TO

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SAVE TEMPTED YOUNG MEN.

BY

A. P. GRAVES, D.D.
"

FOURTH EDITION.

"For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the ungodly shall perish."—*Psalms* 1: 6.

CHICAGO:
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TO

MY ELDEST SON,

WHO IS JUST ENTERING THE RESPONSIBLE YEARS OF LIFE,

WHEREIN HE WILL BE ASSAILED BY MANY
TEMPTATIONS TO LEAD HIM IN
THE DOWNWARD ROAD,

THIS BOOK IS PARENTALLY INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

“WHICH WILL YOU CHOOSE?”

These are the closing words of this book. The perusal of page after page will reveal to the reader their weighty import. There is reason to believe that in New York, Boston, Chicago, Louisville, St. Paul, all the cities, and the rural districts of our land, there are not a few young men, whose sun goes down in darkness, and whose end resembles that of the hero of the following narrative. To change the course and save such as are threatened with the same dangers this little book is given to the young men of my country.

A. P. G.

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DOWN GRADE.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOME OF THOMAS PRONE.

Home is a life center. Again and again the young man deeply realized this living fact. As is the water to the fish, the tree to the bird, the shelter to the beast, so was home to him. And because he did not understand the secret workings of early home influence, so strongly attaching itself to him day by day, its reality was none the less true—none the less a living power, a stern reality that would in coming days restrain false steps, or be painfully resisted. Little did his youthful heart grasp his future; but it was as sure to come as that life should be spared. His father's tender words weighed little now. His wise counsels were thought unreasonable; his morning prayers were a myth; and the blessing at meals was a mysterious something without meaning. His good example was unconsciously overlooked. But, as the learning of the alphabet,

so all these were yet to spread a volume before him. His mother often led his child-thoughts along the items and avenues of the home circle. Hours, days, weeks, months, and years, together with tens of thousands of mother's words, were making DARBY the place of all places to him.

Just along the beautiful stream at the foot of the mountain his home was located. The farm was a fine one of two hundred acres, well stocked and cultivated for a good living. The house and all the buildings were fine. When a little boy, he was familiar with their every scene. The parlor, buttery, kitchen, bed-chamber, the place at the table, mother's seat, and father's seat, together with sisters and brothers, all imbedded in his heart that home about a mile from Darby village. The woodshed and carriage-house, the stable with horses and colts, the sheds with cattle and sheep, the hen-house and pig-sty, and the house for dog Trip, all had a place in his growing childhood. The garden with peas, beans, corn, and various vegetables; the cherry, plum, and apple trees; the currant and raspberry bushes, and the beautiful flowers of various hues along the garden path, attracted his boyish attention more than he knew. The family parties for the children, where they met with the neighbors' children, greeted each other, laughed, sang, and

spent their buoyant life in youthful gratifications, he locked up in memory for other days. The family Bible upon the table, the small library in the book-case, and the weekly papers, religious and secular, were all contributions to the memory of future life. The coming of the family wagon to the door on Sunday morning to take him and the loved ones to church and Sunday school, was an event not to be forgotten. All these and many other scenes were fixing themselves upon his life and character as surely as that he lived.

Little did he mistrust the dangers of the future. It was enough for him to enjoy the quiet and irresponsible hours of home. His sickness and health, joys and sorrows, love and hate, were all shared by parents, sisters, and brothers. Now and then he thought dimly of the possibility of many years to come. When his sister was sick, a thought of death pressed upon his heart. But of dying young he had no idea. Yet in his heart he would sometimes say, "Should I die, where would my soul be?" God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, father, mother, and friends had so taught him that he believed he ought to be a Christian while young. One day he read from the Bible, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." It deeply impressed him; but such were his surroundings with associates, and the inward

workings of a carnal heart, that he stifled his convictions.

One day he heard his father tell a story of a boy who was brought up by a Quaker, who said to the boy, "If thee will do the best thee can, when thee leaves me I will give thee something worth a thousand dollars." And when the boy became a young man and was about to leave, the Quaker gave him a sealed envelope. He broke the seal and found a card with the words, "*A good boy*," written in large letters. This story deeply impressed him, and he inclined to practice the lesson it suggested. This was a golden moment, but he missed it. Little mistakes seemed of small account to him as the days passed on; but as the little drops make the ocean, the mustard seeds the stalk and branches, the acorns the strong oak, so, though he little mistrusted it, the moments, acts, and steps of early life were making him a good or bad, strong or weak character. He became conscious that he was fast advancing in youthful influence and responsibility. He began to go into society, and felt that his parents and friends were daily watching him with interest between hope and fear. To shun bad company was his aim; but little did he know how easy it was to form bad associations ere he was aware of it. And where he least suspected it, the first

lessons of a downward road were taught. Drinking saloons, social club-rooms of gaming, billiard halls, and gambling places are not all the schools of evil influence that catch up choice, unsuspecting boys. This he had not learned; so, shunning these, he hoped to go aright. But, alas! some professing Christian where he chanced to be spending an evening, persuaded him that there was no harm in a social game at cards, and this instruction had its sad force in later years.

Secretly he thought of some pursuit of business for life. A few "castles in the air" were built; but considering matters for the future, he saw that he was not ready to embark on the voyage of life, but he must have more schooling, parental counsel, and maturity of years. So he lingered at the home which God had given him.

CHAPTER II.

HIS ALTAR OF SACRED POWER.

How many altars there are built around the home fireside. The *parental altar* is most salutary for good or ill. It is impossible for this to pass its hours without making a deep impression upon every child of the home. Parental facts live. The name of father and mother is as ineffaceable as the sun, moon or stars. Their words and acts make indelible imprints upon the heart. This young man knew it, but little did he realize the magnitude of its truth. With some parents the influence of this altar is good, and with some it is bad. A young man in England when about to swing from the gallows for crime, seeing his mother at a little distance, wringing her hands, and crying, "O, my son, my son!" turned his withering eyes upon her and cried, "Mother *you* did it, *you* did it!" What a flame of consuming fire to go up from the altar of that parent's influence. But our young man was reared by the light of no such fire. His was one of parental sacredness and blessing.

The *educational altar* at home is one of no small

moment. There is no place where education is more potent than about the home circle. It is true some families are neglectful, and the children grow up in ignorance. Our hero suffered no such neglect. The district school, the academy, and the college were all at his command. Although brought up in a farm house, the library was stocked with well selected books; and several weekly papers, besides monthly magazines, offered him good advantages. Of these he availed himself in a commendable degree.

A *love altar* at home is a mighty power. Every member of the family feels its force. With an affectionate mother, this has no limit. Because of this, children love each other and love their parents. At the home of our young friend this seemed unbounded. He knew its experience, but failed to estimate its worth. He felt the warmth of its altar fires continually. They were well calculated to light up his pathway for the future in happiness and a prosperous life. Every impulse of his nature was being fraught with its consecrations. These he knew, but he could not fathom their depths. As the understratum of rich earth offers fruitfulness and an abundant harvest to its vegetation, so the altar of home love promised rich blessings to THOMAS PRONE of Darby. How

fair the prospect, and how wise would he have been had he appreciated the proffers!

Labor at home always has its altar. And this, when rightly observed by both parents and children, is a power. This young man was taught to work. He knew early how to apply himself to the demands of labor about the home and on the farm. Sometimes, when he saw other boys idle, he thought it hard that he had to work. But every passing hour was developing in him brain and muscle. Had these lessons been rightly applied they would have wrought strongly with him for prosperous life.

But there is no power in the Christian home of a young man like the *sacred altar of prayer*. As the warp and woof in the shuttle work of the loom is, so is this to the life of a young man. Do what he will, he can not extinguish its fires, even "though he make his bed in hell." This is always God-given. At times, Thomas felt this fact. The morning and nightly prayer that went up from his father's lips, and occasionally from his mother, sister, and brother, brought to his heart such divine impressions, by the Holy Spirit, as could never be effaced. Whether he was at home or abroad they would ever offer their silent entreaties to lead him in the good way. Referring to this, he heard Edward R. relate how that one night

as he lay upon his bed he was awakened from sleep and saw a form pass in at his door through the dim light of the moon. It vanished out of sight. Soon a voice was heard. It was the voice of prayer. His mother had come to his chamber and knelt at his bedside in prayer at the midnight hour. How God blessed that prayer! Years after Edward had said when a Christian, "I know not where I should have been had it not been for the prayers of my home." This led Thomas to wonder whether such an experience would ever be his. In this few boys were ever reared under better influences. And what a bright future was before him if his opportunities could only be improved.

CHAPTER III.

HIS BOY COMPANIONS.

They were many. He appeared to be a kind of favorite with them all. They liked him for his jokes, his genial disposition, and leadership of their ranks. Boys always want a leader as much as a company in the army wants a captain. Thomas was the recognized head among the boys of Darby, and they felt a confidence in him that he would say and do the right thing in all their circles of sport or industry. What an opportunity to lead the boys in the right path! He was amply prepared by the hallowed influence of a fine home to bless every boy in his associations. And every boy, no matter how dissolutely inclined, was ready to be blessed. This was his chance. But his natural heart was destined to let it slip.

All boys are more inclined to take a downward than an upward path, in a greater or less degree. And the companions of this young man were not unlike those of other neighborhoods. There were the brilliant and the stupid, the manly and the mean, the brave ones and the cowards, and the

noble and good. He figured to fall into line with the varied tastes of all. When a noble youth inclined to a step in keeping with the best instincts of his nature, he would coincide, if it did not conflict out of measure with the majority of his associates. Boys always go in majorities. If a smart, pert fellow let slip a vulgar or profane word that gained the tacit indorsement of "the boys," though it stung him to the heart, it got no word of rebuke from Thomas, the leader. And even sometimes, when some of the boys sought to be pious, and it brought forth the scornful laughter of many in the company, although it was contrary to the convictions of his heart, he sided with the laugh. The instincts of his nature as well as all the influences of his Darby home were against catering to habits of drinking liquor, smoking, obscene language, speaking disrespectfully of parents or friends, or in any way disgusting the best tastes of good society. It would have been an offense to tell him that he would ever indulge in one of these habits, or even that he was in danger of doing so.

Boys often think themselves safe when, by associations and circumstances, there is hardly the slightest reason for it. Their influence over each other is often, very often, overpowering. Occa-

sionally this boy would feel a slight impression that he ought to shun bad company. Yet when he fell in with the neighborhood boys he was exposed to their influence. As a little spot of paint will soil the clothing, and a little poison in the water do great harm, so the words and acts of one bad boy will destroy much good.

While at play one day with his companions, he heard the news spread through their ranks that Will Jones of their company had, the night before, been converted to Jesus. Some laughed, others swore and disbelieved it, another said it would not last long, and still another declared he would go up and shame Will out of being a Christian; while Thomas said, "it is a good thing for some people." This was more than the boys liked to hear from their leader. At the same time he silently wished his young friend might prove a changed boy, yea, hoped the time might not be far distant when he himself would become a true Christian. The next day, while walking alone down the street, he met Will, and said, "Is it true that you have changed and are going to lead a religious life?" "Yes, Thomas, and the last two days have been the happiest I ever knew. I wish you would come, too, and get what I have found. It is so blessed. Come now, if you will start, the

other boys will go with us." "I know it is all right, but when I get a little older it will be time enough," was the reply. This was a golden opportunity, and neglecting it proved to be a fatal mistake.

CHAPTER IV.

HIS MEN ASSOCIATIONS.

Boys are ambitious to be men. For this reason they seek to imitate their superiors in very many ways. And all boys have the propensities of natural hearts to impel them on. Hence the need of good and healthful influences to guide them aright. It is easier for the majority of boys to go in a bad, than in a good way, yet there are noble exceptions to this. In view of this fact, the men who form their associations are very likely to make ready impressions.

It is true that our young friend had ample opportunity to scan the lives of good men, and take example from their characters. Yet his neighborhood was not free from the opposite. And although there were restraints in his mind which, if allowed, would have blessed him then and in the days to come, he catered too much to the society of dissolute and profane men. And while he did not particularly love their society, he did not shun it. A man who has grown into mature years in habits of evil thoughts and actions, will not be likely to exert a very hallowed influ-

ence over a rising boy, but may do much harm, and almost have the lad under sinful control before he is aware of it. Thomas was a boy easily led, on the one hand, and an easy and natural leader on the other. His early training had its promptings in all his surrounding circumstances. Yet the men of sinful life around him had in no small degree an influence to lead him in sin. The habits of smoking, profanity, playing cards, drinking, and kindred evils with men of years and maturity about him, sometimes inclined him to think their practice would make a man of him. Just to be a man was his chief desire. So a form, five feet eight inches high, with an age of twenty-five or thirty years presented an ideal man. Character, habits and practices were, of course, all secondary. But you might as well undertake to make wheat out of sand, or gold coin out of copper, as to make a man of worth without character. Here this youth failed in his conclusions. And in spite of the memories of his blessed home he deliberately chose the unhallowed associations of men around him. Thomas might as well have attempted to swim in the lake without getting wet, as to associate with such company without getting harm.

On seeing men upright and good he would be kindly impressed, and inclined to their standard

and example. A neighbor was led to reform and set out on a Christian life. This filled the heart of the boy of Darby with deep interest. He could not doubt for a moment that he had done the best thing. The matter had his indorsement, and down in his heart he believed it was best to be a true Christian. Yet he was not prepared to express his views. Other men, instead of commending, ridiculed the idea of a religious life. He listened to their jests and jeers under secret protest but with an outward smile. This was the place, and now the time, for him to plant the moral seed-corn for future uprightness. Golden moment! As the spring is seedtime for a good wheat harvest, so boyhood days are for the happiness of manhood. But how many men of years, with the bitter experience of sinfulness, lead our boys downward when they should warn them and turn their steps upward. Thomas did not know this now, and so he went as he was led. His steps were few and short it is true, but long journeys are not made in a minute. Whatever thought he had of his danger was dismissed by the conclusion that he could change when he got a little older. Fatal mistake. A habit is a habit, and he found it so later in life. His mind was brilliant, his nerve vigorous, his strength firm, and his boyhood full of promise.

The men of his place were not slow to discover these traits. But good men with whom he associated daily were too lax in doing him good, and the bad men too ready to draw around him the network of sinfulness. Perhaps neither fully apprehended the effect of their influence upon the boy whom they admired. But as the helm works under the ship, guiding it in a certain direction, so the secret impulses of our young friend bore him out upon the ocean of life toward the maelstrom of death.

CHAPTER V.

HIS EDUCATIONAL ADVANTAGES.

Never was a boy more susceptible of common education and a knowledge of letters than Thomas Prone of Darby. At least such was his appearance in this, that it was frequently a matter of remark among the neighbors. Some thought that by all means he should have a liberal education, while others thought if he had a common school education it would answer his purpose for life's responsibilities, and still others were inclined to the idea that if he went away from home to school his habits might become dissolute and lead him to some sad end. In his needs and inclinations, what could and should be done for him his parents were not idle in considering. What could be done for his mental improvement in the district school they were decided to do, and also they determined to send him to the academy and to college, if at all practicable. Although he belonged to a well-to-do farmer's family, the children were numerous; and to supply their domestic needs and give all of them a good education required much wisdom and money. But

Thomas began to show signs of having both wish and talent to be well educated. He was considerably in advance of most of the boys in school, so much so that the schoolmaster was proud of his brilliant pupil, and felt that he was of such unusual promise that he ought to have advantages beyond the limits of this school. There was no dullness about him. He learned easily and quickly. When he had leisure moments after studying his lessons he was fond of tricks with the scholars, yet at times he had earnest thoughts about a thorough and higher education for the responsibilities of life. His arithmetic, grammar, geography, and indeed all the studies taught in the district school, were being finished up. And so highly did the schoolmaster esteem the talent of our young friend that he had taken special pains for his perfectness in every branch.

His teacher talked with his parents about his going to a higher school. They were quite pleased that he should take such interest in their son. The son himself felt the necessities of the hour. He longed to have a chance to advance in his studies, yet, like too many boys, his wishes were aimless. He wanted knowledge, but had no idea what he was going to do with it. And, still worse, he had never thought that knowledge is a power for evil as well as a power

for good. As easily could a bird be shot without taking aim as could a young man get an education and wisely use it without good calculations and plans. He should study his plans and decide his intentions.

An instance in the past years of Mr. Prone now stirred up his mind with thought. He had known a boy who, on asking his father if he could go to college, received the reply, "My son, I should as soon think of putting a sword into the hands of a madman as to send you to college without religion." He wanted his boy to have a good education and be a good man. For this he prayed. He was willing to deny self and do all in his power for the best good of his son. But, after considering matters as well as he could, he concluded to give him a good academic education. At Holly there was a fine academy. Here our young friend found as good advantages as he could wish. What a chance! How many young men would like it and make a good use of it!

CHAPTER VI.

HIS COMPANY AT SCHOOL.

The associations of school. What are they? They are the wise and unwise, good and bad, and often the influence of these associations is as potent as any to be found. From the child of six years in the district school to the oldest student in college, every one has a molded and a molding influence for good or evil.

Thoughtlessly the Prone boy entered Holly Academy to get his lessons, recite, and have a lot of lively, congenial companions about him. He had little or no thought that here his character would be largely formed for all the days of his life, and for the world to come. Just before he stepped into the wagon for his father to take him to Holly, his mother took his hand and said: "Now, my child, study well and keep good company." A mother can speak such words as no other can. He received his good-bye kiss. Sitting by the side of his loved and loving father, the ride of nearly a whole day brought him to the academy. Memorable day! Many were the words of good advice he received during that ride. The

benefits and abuses of education were canvassed, and the influence of good and bad company was set forth by the sound utterances of a country farmer to a loved son. He felt their force and determined in the secret thoughts of his heart to keep good company at school. This was honest, and, as he supposed, a true purpose. Now the needed thing was firmness.

Just after his trunk is unloaded, he sees the stranger boys along the walks and about the building. They, too, have come to school. That boy he first meets, just on the steps of the boarding-hall, is Frank Wilton, from Downy. "Are you going to attend school here?" asks Thomas. "Yes sir," is the reply. Frank appears well, yet the stranger from Darby knows nothing about him. One after another the boys rally and become acquainted with each other. It is easy to get acquainted at school, but the influence exerted is not so easily adjusted. Students lead each other; and it is an undeniable fact that, while some take an upright position and turn all their surroundings into a power for a good and prosperous life, others go downward and compel all their acquirements and advantages to act as a mighty engine to plunge them into the sad night of moral death.

Thomas was invited into the students' prayer

meeting, which was appointed the first week of the term. There were only fifteen or twenty in attendance, but he rather enjoyed it. The prayers were fervent for God's blessing upon the whole school; for the teachers; that all the students might be Christians, and especially that the boys who had pious parents might be shielded from evil. This strengthened his purpose to be good; and, had he continued these weekly opportunities, it might have been the fortune of his life and the eternal joy of his soul. When the hour for prayer meeting came the next week, he was playing ball, and thought he would not attend. In the game, the boys, of course, were a mixed company. Our friend did not like the profane and dissolute expressions, and almost wished he had gone with the praying ones.

The next morning the leader of the meeting said to him, "You did not come with us last evening; we had a most happy time." "No," said the young man; "I could not come very well; but I will try and come next time." Another week wedded him more than ever to the company of the prayerless students. It is quite easy to frame excuses from meeting with the prayer meeting students, and indeed to shun their company altogether. Thomas was faithful to his studies, but seemed to be quite thoroughly com-

mitted to the company which would not have been selected for him by father, mother, or his best friends. He knew and felt most keenly that he was not taking the course that he should take. But it is so hard for young men to break associations when once formed. And Thomas' case was no exception. The excellent letters of his mother, the good advice of his teachers, and the entreaties of the upright students failed to effect the change needed. He thought that if he guarded against things criminally wrong, his course and associations could not be very bad. But alas! As the kernels of corn lead the wild bird along into the snare, so the steps of sinful companions lead a boy to the saddest end. The people of Darby hoped much from their young townsman, and heard that he was a good scholar. But how often hopes are disappointed when they never should have been.

CHAPTER VII.

HIS MISTAKES AT SCHOOL.

He was a good scholar and always respected his teachers. This was commendable. And his desire was to win the respect and good will of all his fellow students. But many things which do not seem wrong in the life of a student, in later days, prove to have been actual mistakes. An education to be rightly directed should be consecrated to the highest wisdom known to earth. And nowhere is this more apparent than in the lettered training of a young man of brilliant and promising talents. Such was this student from Darby, and here he made a mistake. He had heard of a young man who, on entering upon his studies, determined that he would lay every acquisition of knowledge on the altar of God, and he was impressed with the real wisdom of such a course. He knew full well that to pursue such a course would be like supplying a fine ship for a long voyage with good helm and chart. But inaction kept him from following up his true convictions. The saddest mistake in many a boy's life is that he is untrue to the honest convictions of his heart. It

is true the natural heart is just what the Bible says it is, when it declares that "the carnal mind is enmity against God;" and there are but few boys impressed that it is best to do wrong.

To do right is almost always the advice of the better judgment, and Thomas Prone had been too well trained at home to lack in this direction. He felt its force; yet to please the boys he would go astray. Conscience within and restraining influence without could not stop him. That Saturday afternoon when he consented to go out on Sunday, he took an ill step. It was but a little step it is true, but every large river has its starting point, and every great fire has a small beginning. His Sunday ride only kindled incentives to Sabbath breaking. He wanted to go again. And during the week he laid plans to spend the next Sunday in pleasure and pastime.

One step leads to another. All such schools as the one at Holly have rules, strict rules, for hours of study, and retirement at night. This pupil had maintained marked integrity in observance on these rules. But when, by a practice of deception, he had broken the rules of attending church on Sunday, it was easy to break other rules. Hence it required but little temptation to neglect his studies in the evening and stay out late. And this would be sure to lead him

into company not the best. Young men don't enjoy roving about nights, and often to a late hour, alone. He enjoyed company and would have it, and in his selection of associates he made a sad mistake. This was mainly in a lack of sense of moral integrity. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." There is not a thing in life which a young man needs at home, school, or elsewhere, more than companions whose words, actions, and influence are calculated to elevate good character.

Another mistake he made was in neglecting the Bible. His mother had taken good care to put a Bible in his trunk and charge him to give it daily attention. He did not heed the charge. Of all the books with students they should give some time, daily, to the *One book*. He knew that wonderful revelation, "where-withal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy Word." His mother, in her excellent letters, would often ask about his gettings along, especially in reading his Bible. He would evade giving an answer. Another mistake. No boy at school can commit a greater error than to keep back his items of daily experience from his parents. Many a time Thomas was conscious that seeking to cover up his faults from his

parents was wrong. But as his course became more and more faulty, he was more and more loathe to let his parents know of his daily habits. What a record it makes, every line of which shall yet be read with sad regrets. A boat nearing the falls of Niagara was never in more danger than is a young man at school in withholding his daily course from his parents at home. Could the Darby boy have realized this it might have saved him many a sad hour.

CHAPTER VIII.

HIS MORAL TENDENCIES.

Never did a young man start out in the world with more light and knowledge as to right and wrong than this one. So strong had been the home influences and instruction that entwined about his every step, that the natural infidelity usual to such a youth had little place in his heart, or power over his life. To embrace hurtful doctrines and principles he must acquire them. But to ever let them get control over his life was farthest from his wishes. Yet, even with the best purposed boys, Satan has the most artful devices. And it is an old trick of the enemy of man to select the most brilliant youth for his ministers of sin. Is this young man to be one of them? Nothing could be farther from his thoughts. In his own mind he really supposed that his moral tendencies were upward and not downward.

But how easy it is to take a wrong path, when we have ever so good a desire to go right. He would shudder at the very hint that he might go downward and lead others along with him. But there are helps enough for either course. No

young man need lack for these, and he had them in abundance. Parents, home, the good influence of early years, many friends that loved him, besides the better dictates and noble impulses of his own heart, were all impelling him to acts and decisions for usefulness and happiness in the world. This was his tendency, and this was his hope. But these are times that take strong decision to stem the tide of dissipation and error. And the tendencies of this young man could not firmly remain in their present course without unreserved consecration to the right. And if he does not have this speedily, there will ere long be a change that will tell, and tell mightily, upon his whole course of life for this world and another. He need not plunge into crime at a single step to bring ruin upon himself; only to neglect to do what he ought to do is enough for the first step. Neglect has ruined many a young man, and made his end terrible. And it is to be feared it will do the same for many more. Is it not strange that so many boys of mind and intelligence, and who have line upon line of warning from many a traveler who has trod rough paths before them, will persist in the way of destruction? But so it is. Just to neglect to give careful attention to the things which he knew were right was his bane.

And thus he tended onward and downward

without the slightest idea of such an end. The day he met his friend Henry Arnold, from Darby, every moral instinct of his nature was aroused within him. Henry told him of the reform in his neighborhood, where so many had signed the pledge, and also many had been converted; and during this recital Thomas lived over all his boyhood days. The good seed that had been sown in his heart was quick to prompt an earnest wish to be right with God and man.

Now he could take a stand, and he knew it. His heart told him to do it. Noble impulses! Well had it been for him had he yielded to them, and followed their dictates. But he did not. And a man could not do a worse thing by willfully putting out his eyes than did this youth in closing up the avenues of his heart in such an hour.

CHAPTER IX.

HE WEIGHS RELIGION.

Man is a religious being. Never since his Maker said to him, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," has he been without a worshiping heart. Some have affirmed and some have denied their obligations; but this has not changed the nature of the case.

The devout state of the Prone family truly represented the young man of this narrative, who was so unsuspectingly traveling his downward course. Not a day passed but that he had thoughts upon religious subjects. Of course, a young man can never settle upon a belief, doctrine, or religious practice without calculating the right, and deciding upon it. Our young friend was too intelligent to overlook this important point. He considered the various schemes and doctrines of evangelical truth; and thought that he was quite well informed for one of his years. And really there can be no doubt that he had done well, as far as the intellectual was concerned. But as well might the wheels and machinery of the engine undertake to do good service without

steam rightly propelling inside, as a young man to have a correct religious life without *the heart* being right. He learned and believed that Christianity means true life and action. He not only wisely considered orthodox creeds good, but believed their doctrines, carried out, to be a living power and not a dead form. There was not the slightest discount in his mind upon this fact. But young men's minds are active; they can learn easier than unlearn. He had not fully understood this; but it was true nevertheless, and in nothing more than matters of religion. How could he obliterate the knowledge, or its force, which he had acquired of the geography of Africa, the figures of mathematics, or the rules of grammar? He could not. No more could he the indelible impressions he had received about religion. But it is possible he may turn his good opportunities to a very bad account.

Fine wheat which might have made excellent bread, can be turned into whisky, and thus become a very demon to destroy. So the very religious culture of his early years may now be perverted and become the enemy of his soul. There are always false doctrines at hand that can be made to look very plausible, which will give license to sin, and assure hope for good, even though it be a false hope. As a fine

garden may be easily run over with weeds which destroy the good vegetation, so Thomas could now consent to a false system of belief that would bear fruits of unhappiness and sorrow. And so, with what he thought was a good examination and a good conclusion, he was led wrongly; and, as the boat once in the downward current is not easily stopped until it plunges into the whirlpool, so his religious conclusions led him toward the inevitable loss of his soul.

CHAPTER X.

HIS SERIOUS DECISION.

Decisions are stubborn things, and especially with young men. Thomas Prone knew this. At least his experience and observation had taught him that when a young man said I will, or will not do a thing, he did not easily retract. This had its influence. And when taking steps which he knew were important he felt its power. Temptation, especially concerning religious decision, lurked about him. It took a stronger hold upon him than he thought, though he felt its grasp.

The investigations of the past days and weeks had stirred up his heart to feel that he must take a stand religiously. To decide adversely to the counsel and prayers of pious parents, the influences of a Christian home, and the dictates of honest convictions, he actually detested in his heart. But alas! one book, good and true, of ancient origin has said, "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." This proved a reality to him. And

what a struggle he had with this most fearful of all facts! All his early culture and the examinations he had lately made were barriers not easily overcome. But when the carnal heart is moved in a downward course, it is capable of almost any scheme of unbelief and evil. In spite of good impulses and desires it impelled him onward to the decisive step of unbelief. Yet just here he was checked.

A letter from his mother, bears the best of counsel and advice. And, as one look upon the flowing river will carry thoughts to the boiling head fountains, so this letter carries his thoughts and heart emotions along over his youthful years to linger again at the family altar and happy home circle. Before he reads the letter through the tears are falling. He has a glimmering view of his careless course. He reviews it a little, and sees that it has led him farther in the wrong path than he supposed. He sees at a glance where it would have been far better to have taken a different course. The doubts he has tried to entertain about the Bible now bear their legitimate fruit. The books he has read denying the divine reality of religion, are to him beds of thorns, while the infidel influences of wicked men have well nigh overwhelmed him.

One beautiful morning he meets a Christian man who leads him into conversation. He enjoys the conversation because he sees in it some hope that he may be extricated from the meshes of unbelief which now seem to be the fastnesses of his soul. This man seems to apprehend the situation at once. He meets every argument squarely and plainly. But the flukes of an anchor never took stronger hold of the bed of the sea than does unbelief the natural heart whenever it makes its grasp. The young man listens. But while every word commends itself to his mind, his heart rebels against a decision for holiness. Thus he hears, considers, and stands, for a time. And while he fully knows that the Bible is the best guide-book a young man ever had, he attacks its divine truthfulness because he can not understand it *all*, and because *he thinks* it does not harmonize in itself.

Poor fellow! He forgets that many a man has brought ruin on himself because he chose the dross of earth rather than pure heavenly gold. His Christian friend shows him that the best evidence that the Bible is divine, is that no finite mind can fully understand it, that it is a blessing to every one who accepts it, and that he had better receive it as he eats bread, using a little every day, and when his soul shall enlarge

into eternal day he will understand its mysteries. But no. His propensities for sin declare that they want no religious restraints or priestly control. Fatal step! Sad decision! This is going from bad to worse. But the end is not yet.

CHAPTER XI.

HIS MORAL POISON.

He tries to entertain the notion that there is no hell in the future for the wicked. Sometimes he thinks he succeeds, and sometimes that such views are a mistake. But how little does he realize that, with rare exceptions, every moral impulse of the human family compels them to believe in the doctrine of future punishment. It is true that many argue against it, and he hears them, but while they are far from making out their case to others, they do not and can not believe it without one doubt themselves. Thomas knows what men who are true to God and his word say about it. And it looks clear to him that the holiness of God must embrace justice and mercy. And that every principle of divine love must utterly forbid the sinner to enter heaven without repentance and pardon. But to repent, to shun the pains of hell, is just what he has not done and is not willing to do.

In looking for strength to bolster up his position, and have it well at the last, he finds men of some culture and standing to help him. But

help is not always success, and plausible arguments are not always assurance. As easily can the doctrine of heaven be blotted from the Bible as the doctrine of a hell. So, also, could this young man as well succeed in an attempt to sweep the rolling waters from the bed of the sea as to rid himself of the impression of a future retribution. Yet in spite of this he endeavors to smother conviction and concur with the instincts of his depraved nature. And thus he declares he will not believe in eternal punishment of the sinner for the sins of this short life. But as well might he conclude that human law will not condemn a man for the sin of killing his fellow, which took but sixty seconds, fifty years or a lifetime in the state prison. Foolish, dreadful and fatal determination! It is poison, and worse than poison, to his soul.

How easy it is to put poison in the cup, but it is not so easy to cure a person after he has drunk it. And this disbelief in the doctrine of a hell is the quintessence of all unbelief, which brings disaster to life and ruin to the soul. There was something about this young man which made him dread the consequences of the condition into which he had cast his moral destiny. But it is of little use to regret having touched the incendiary match when the house is well nigh consumed. So,

many a man has cast the die in unbelief and sorrowed in remorse when the fires of hell were well kindled about him.

Better a thousand times not strike the match, and better a thousand times not decide against God's truth and his own soul. But so he did.

CHAPTER XII.

HE CONSIDERS BUSINESS.

“Shall I be a merchant, agriculturist, or mechanic?” said Thomas, as his thoughts glanced out into the future. This was no small question; and, although at that moment it might be boyish, or a youthful thought, some time, if he lived, it must be settled. He can not always be an idle speculator about matters of life. Hence it is that he, at times, for hours so carefully surveys the different spheres of action. There are features of a farmer life that he likes. To be a mechanic is farthest from his wishes. The mercantile business attracts him somewhat. At least, he has so much peculiar interest in this—that he examines many of its successful and some of its unsuccessful features. He would like to be a grocer if he could get a start; but to expect any material help from home is out of the question, and, as for himself, he has laid up no pennies. The dry goods trade favorably invites his attention. This, he thinks, will please his fancy; but to get a position as clerk and work into the business seems to be the only feasible thing to do. Yet

even in this the way seems dark. Whatever he does, he is satisfied that he must make his position. No way being open in the line of dry goods, he wonders how the druggist's business would do.

Just at this time a man who is going to start a store of this very kind at Brown's Station, hears that a young man by the name of Thomas Prone, from Darby, wants to get a situation in some kind of a store and learn the business. The next day a letter reaches our young friend, asking if he would like such a place, and if his habits as to profanity, Sabbath observance, keeping good company, etc., are correct. He is also asked if he can give good references as to moral character and sentiment.

Now he begins to feel that to get along well in the world one needs substantial character. His recent religious speculations and conclusions do not help him much now. Nevertheless, he succeeds in obtaining a few friends who get him the situation, but not exactly in a way to altogether satisfy his own conscience. What, shall a young man enter business with a smothered conscience, and as a cheat? Can he expect to succeed? Hardly. But it is only for two months on trial. Is it anything strange that he thinks in half that time every wrong purpose, thought,

or act can be set right? But he has not spent so many youthful years resisting appeals, entreaties, advice, together with stern convictions for the right, to now, in a single hour or day, unlearn what he has learned, or undo what he has done. But he tries. He amends. He thinks he is succeeding; and really there are times when his employer feels encouraged that he will make a good clerk and build up the business. Certainly, things look hopeful; but how few know the struggles of this boy's breast in desire of the right! Sometimes he thinks that he will succeed in establishing himself in the right; but his way seems dark and forbidding. Hope against hope is now his experience.

CHAPTER XIII.

HIS WORLDLY CHARMS.

These have no small hold upon a young man. If he is just clever, and a little stupid, the attractive things of the world do not affect him so much. But if brilliant, pert, and attractive, he is just the one to be overcome with temptation. There are exceptions to this, of course. But Thomas had learned to be fond of society, games, and worldly pastimes. Every instinct of his nature craved them. He hardly thought, however, that they would ever control him to his injury. As the saying goes, "his wild oats must be sown." At least this was his notion; and like most young people, yes, and many old people too, he never had thought that in this respect like begets like. If we sow corn the harvest will be corn, if we sow wheat the harvest will be wheat, and if we sow wild oats the harvest will be wild oats. Could he have been instructed in this principle it might have led him differently. If rightly disposed, a young man can as easily sow good seed as bad.

Our friend need not have been an exception

to this, in forming character for a good heart, a good life, and a good death. What, will Thomas Prone of Darby, with all his home culture, good advantages, and hallowed surroundings, make a mistake right here? As soon might a man when he had planted his beautiful garden with potatoes, and beans, and peas, and onions, and beets, and strawberries, be suspected of sowing it all over with cockle and tares. Yet this is just what he did. Sad mistake! Instead of a straightforward, commending course of uprightness, his appearance at times was a little suspicious. He did not seem as faithful as he might. Young friends began to call at the store and take his time and attention when he should have been acquiring the confidence of his employers by industry. Now is the time for him to be faithful and get strong for business. Sunday comes, and his employer suggests the hour of Sunday school, and invites him to church and to sit in his pew. But he has another project in view. A few of his new acquaintances are going out to ride and he has promised to go along. This does not speak very well for the recommend that procured his situation.

Still the druggist at Brown's Station is honestly anxious to see the young man come out right, and the clerk as honestly intends to do so. But

as well might a carpenter undertake to build a house without tools, as a young man to build up a good situation as clerk in a store without steady habits and honest integrity. The latter part of the second week he asks to be let off for the evening at eight o'clock. The dance gotten up by his newly found associates was well attended, a time of high glee and some dissipation withal. His appearance the next day did not indicate very strongly good rest and sleep the night before. Business suffered some. And this did not promise much for success in his two months' trial.

Mostly his course indicated tact, aptness, and skill in the line of a business life. And had he given himself to his position with true devotion he would have succeeded admirably. But worldly associations, with the kindred habits of cards, ball clubs, theaters, and Sunday dissipation, were his bane. A healthy body must sooner or later yield to a constantly eating cancer; so also must the promising prospects of a fast young man give way to the cancerous gnawings of worldly impulses. Hence his trial time did not last two months.

CHAPTER XIV.

HIS VIEWS OF RIGHT.

Boys often get very strange ideas of what is right and what is wrong. And this young man took the position that he had a right to do as he pleased when his day's work was done, or when the Sunday came—that out of store hours his time was his own. He forgot that a business man has some interest in knowing whether his clerks take rest or dissipate when out of actual service, which would fit or unfit them for duty. Of course, no sane man of mature years would for a moment entertain the position of this young man. But young men have to live and learn; and often they learn in various schools.

When his trial in the drug store proved a failure, Thomas went home. He was frank enough to tell why he did not succeed, but equally earnest to maintain his right to do as he pleased when out of the store. Little did he think that this was only an incidental item in the category of his abused life. Men are not liable to wrong their fellows before they have wronged their Maker. He had been taught that

the first law of right is "to fear God and keep His commandments." Had he done this, his now perverted ideas of right, which are causing him much trouble, would have never entered his head. But he had become a Sabbath breaker, a little profane, and had begun to hold a loose rein over many sins that were making his days evil.

His parents began to see the situation of their dear boy, but, although they were sorry for his troubles, he got no sympathy from them in his views. They repeated many of the lessons of his early instruction at home; but he did not receive such words very kindly now. He had been to bad schools. Nights and days with profligate companions had told upon his growing years. He thought that he knew his rights, and he was going to maintain them—and that, even to the grief of his parents and friends.

But a young man with such views and such a position could no more properly conduct himself in life than the states' prison could reform a murderer. A few days at home softened down his feelings somewhat. He wished he was different. His father could pray, his mother could sweetly counsel, and brothers and sisters could encourage him to do right; but, while he still loved home, he was wedded to other scenes and other friends. He thought he ought to change,

but he did not; he thought he was in danger, but did not get out of it. More and more his wrong views hardened his heart, and, as the log glides down the stream until it suddenly goes over the rapids, so he was passing along the current of time.

CHAPTER XV.

HIS PURSUIT OF ERROR.

It matters little what the position of wrong doing is; when once taken, it is liable to be pursued. It is hard for thistle seeds to find a fruitful lodgment on a farm, but, when started, how soon they will overrun the whole field! So, when a young man becomes poisoned with error, he consents to do or believe a wrong thing, and then pursues it. If he steals, he does not stop with one act; if he swears, a single oath is not enough; if he disobeys his parents, once will not suffice; if he disbelieves the Bible, he must avow it; if he scoffs at religion, the thing must be repeated; and, if he is careless about his company, like the floating logs in the river, he will find plenty on either side to impel him on.

The Darby boy was subject to all this and much more. The huge rock in the ocean may stand the dashing of the waves, but he could not stand against this tide of error. Hence he pursues his course with no faltering step. Satan beguiles him, and false doctrines become the pernicious fastnesses of his soul. With avidity he

spurns every reformatory influence. Could he see himself as he really is now in the inmost inclinations of his soul, his cheek would tingle with blushing. But on he goes. The evil days have begun. As is the runaway horse when he starts slowly and with the finest carriage in town, so is he in his present course. All looks well, but the danger is imminent. His rein is loose; his heart is unchecked.

He is not only wrongly directed about the truths of the Lord's word, but also about the best course of moral living. He finds few charms now in either literary or holy things. His heart is almost set backward against the memory of better days. Right or wrong, he intends, at least in the main, to pursue his present course. Just here he procures some books that fan the flame already kindled in his heart. He does not read of faith, hope, love, charity, and prayer, and, above all, the blood of Jesus to cleanse the heart from sin; but he does read about liberty of conscience to do as one pleases, without any fear of God; a sweeping opposition to the Church and Christianity; and a tirade against the Bible. Such reading is acceptable food for his demoralized condition. It pleases him and helps him on his course.

CHAPTER XVI.

HIS AFFLICTION.

He is startled when the news reaches him that his sister Alice is very sick. "Is she dangerously ill?" he asks the messenger. "I don't know exactly, the doctor was with her most of the day yesterday," was the reply. This pierced his heart with sadness. He had ardent love for Alice. In spite of his wayward course her prayers and love had a strong hold upon his heart. "Wonder if she is really very sick? What will I do if she should leave me? It can not be possible that she will die before I get home. Wish I had not pained her so much by my wrong doing." These are the soliloquies of his heart. How changed are his feelings and every impulse of his moral nature at this afflicting news. He did not expect it. Had hardly thought such a thing were possible. "How long ago was she taken sick, and does her fever run high?" he asks as he rides along. "Three days ago she took her bed, but we did not think her very sick until we found her fever running exceedingly high yesterday morning," is the reply. Thomas is moved to tears.

His heart has not been so broken and melted for a long time.

As he rides up to the door his brother Willie meets him and says, "Come in, Thomas, as quickly as you can, Alice is only just alive." He can not realize the situation, but with quickened step hastens to her bedside. What a change since he last saw her. He bends over her wasting form and imprints a kiss upon her fevered lips. She knows him and reciprocates. "You are very sick, sister." "Yes, brother, I am glad you got here, I shall not be with you long, and I want you to prepare to meet me in heaven." She had been a sweet and happy Christian several years. Her influence over Thomas had been the best. But this is such an hour as he has not thought of or looked for. How these sisterly words from her dying bed take hold of his heart. He holds her hand as the tears trickle down both cheeks. He can not speak, for he has loved her tenderly. She is sinking fast. The family group stand around the bed with anxious hearts. They feel that their home will be without its charms when Alice is gone, and they can not give her up. But death lets go no grasp on account of ties of affection. She waves her hand and looks up with an angelic look, to give and receive the last parting, dying kiss. It is done, and she sweetly passes to that

land "where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest."

He feels now that home is not what it was. During the preparations for the funeral he is led to review former years and consider his present state of heart. The next morning at prayer every member feels most keenly that their home circle is broken.

Thomas was never before so deeply impressed with the anxiety, the prayers, and the love of his home. This was a memorable season at family worship. Many of the morning cares are laid aside for funeral arrangements. The neighbors begin to come in to help in the necessary details and give their sympathy. The minister must be notified of the place and the hour of the funeral. Owing to Mr. Prone's official position, and being a man highly esteemed, it is thought best to have the funeral in the church. At three o'clock the lovely Alice is carried from her home, now enshrouded in gloom and bereavement. The procession is long. What sighs and sadness mark every feature of her young friends who follow the hearse. When the minister begins the address the eyes of Thomas, red with weeping, look earnestly up from that mourning group upon him. This is the first sermon he has heard in a long time. It sinks deep into his heart. He looks

first upon the coffin and then upon the minister. The sins of which neither his sister nor parents ever knew, rise up before him. The last look at that dear face beckons him heavenward. The coffin, the grave, and the last hours at home, as well as those memorable dying words, can not be forgotten.

Just before returning, his sorrow stricken mother takes him aside for a word of conversation and counsel. He partially opens his heart to her concerning his sinful course. He is willing to bow by her side. What a prayer! A mother's prayer. "O God, bless my dear boy. He is the child Thou hast given me. I have loved him, and Thou hast loved him. He has been away, O Lord, and Thine eye hath seen every step of his course. Thou knowest all his ways, and can he not be saved from a sad end on earth, and the eternal loss of his soul? Gracious Lord, I pray that he may be. Alice is now gone. He will hear her voice and receive her angel letters no more. O, Lord, bless all she has ever done for him to save his soul, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

Though he make his bed in hell, he can never forget this prayer. Here and now he resolves upon a better life. He purposes to reform in some things that he may meet his sister in heaven. But human resolutions without divine aid are men of straw.

CHAPTER XVII.

HIS TENDENCY TO CHANGE.

Of course, under such circumstances, he must at least be inclined to a change in some way. The blackest catalogue of crime could not prevent this. His heart must be adamant for it to be otherwise. But what shall it be is the question. If it is effective and true it must be radical. Of course his former conclusions about a future state would bring sister and himself together in heaven, irrespective of the sins or virtues of this life.

No hell is the doctrine he has adopted. But he has been careful not to lisp this at home. He knew it would not find the slightest sympathy there. While it would please his state of heart, he could not get undoubted assurance of the truth of doctrine. He had thought this matter of belief was settled; but the death of his sister brought to his view his false doctrine and evil course in a way he never saw them before. Young men never get settled in wrong belief and wrong actions. They try to be, but invariably fail. The very nature of the case forbids it. It

would be as easy for water to run up hill as for conscience to permit such a thing.

Loaded down with the weight of impressions received during the past few days, Thomas, with tender heart and good desires, set about righting himself. But he was morally blind. A depraved heart and wrong views of God and holiness had blinded the eyes of his understanding. It would be as easy for a fish to swim without water, or a bird to fly without wings, as for him to get right without seeking divine help. Pursuing his thoughts about the future state, he opens his long neglected Bible, that Bible that Alice had presented to him as a Christmas gift a few years ago. That she is now in heaven he has not a doubt. He reads about a new heart, a holy life, and hope as an anchor of the soul. He also reads, "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish;" and, "without the shedding of blood there is no remission." And further in looking over the word of God his eye rests upon the case of the rich man and Lazarus. He reads it through. The poor man was carried by the angels heavenward. How his thoughts linger about the sweet and heavenly memories of Alice. She is there, his heart exclaims. He reads on. At a glance he sees the doom of the rich man. This is the Lord speaking to him. The experience of a lost soul has never

impressed him so before. He reads the account over and over again. It staggers his former conclusions. He is "almost persuaded."

Never was he more deeply impressed with the realities of divine truth than at this hour. It is a golden moment for him for time and eternity. His tendency to change from bad to good, from the broad to the narrow way, was never so marked as now. It is doubtful if it will ever be again. The word of God now compels him to understand the radical necessity of right views of doctrine and a right state of heart for well being in this world and another, and he can no more shake off these convictions than he can live without breathing.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HE MISTAKES HIS COURSE.

In a long journey, finger-boards to point out the right road may be very useful. So a young man amid the avenues of life needs often to be pointed in the right way. When rightly directed he will do well if he take heed. No person ever more needed wise direction than did this young man in this hour of his great trial. If he can not now be guided aright, reformed, and saved, there is but little reason to hope for the future. But as the traveler can easily read the right direction of the finger-board, and then shun the right road, so can Thomas reject the potent influences and instructions now used for his blessing. It is in this he makes one of the most vital mistakes of his life. Never before has his heart been so susceptible of truth, a right position, and a right course. The sickness, death, coffin, and funeral of our dearest and best friends do not often come to affect our hearts. He knew this, and did not wish to mistake their lessons. But how often just at the point of a wise decision a sad step is taken.

Never was a newly plowed field more ready for the wheat-seed that would bring forth a goodly harvest, than was his heart to receive the good seed of the heavenly kingdom. But alas, when the field is plowed and mellowed, how quickly the wild grass and weeds will over-run it if it is not rightly improved. So with all the moral susceptibilities. Can it be possible that he can be beguiled into temptation in the midst of these tender scenes and keen convictions? But young men are not saved easily, and especially when the strongholds of unbelief have served them as this one. He feels this. Former years had made him understand it as a living fact, yet he never realized it as now. The tacit decision of his heart now was to get right, live right, and end right. And this was fine. Of course the corn can not grow until the seed is planted. But it is one thing to put in the seed and quite another to care for the tender plant when it has sprouted. Thus he found it true in the purpose and development of a right state of heart. Good intentions could not be smothered long. They must soon come out or die.

He found that the nature of man is such that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” And in order to stand firm to his quickened determination he must speak it out, must confess it before his comrades. In this he

made a mistake. Few noble young men make greater mistakes than are made at this point. Here he turned his course of thought, action, and destiny. On he went. Not exactly to plunge into the vortex all at once. No, no. It was but another step, the import of which he did not yet understand. It was only a step in the wrong direction, but that was enough for the present. The merchant need not neglect his store long to ruin his business, and the already kindled flames need not be long neglected to burn down the house. No more need Thomas long neglect to improve the favored opportunity, to bring upon himself impending ruin.

CHAPTER XIX.

HIS MISTAKE DISCOVERED.

Seldom are mistakes discovered until after they are made. When a young man wishes to do a thing that looks at least plausible, he is loathe to believe that it is unwise. And to desist is almost out of the question. Our friend was no marked exception to this rule. And when he had done a wrong thing it was no easy thing to convince him of his error. He held to his position tenaciously. And even when there was evidence of his mistake and the evil of his course, he did not want to stop if he could find any reason to justify him in it.

What is told to young men of their sins is not very convincing. A thief does not like to be told that he is a thief; a liar that he tells lies; an incendiary that he set fire to the house; or a libertine that he is an adulterer. He covers up his sins if he can. What, let them be brought to the light? No, not he if he can help it.

It is true this profligate, sorrow stricken boy may not have been guilty of any of these debasing crimes. But the plague of his life since he

left home was, covering up secret sins from his parents, sisters and brothers. Home influence is often a sharp detective. And especially in such an event as the death of Alice. Conscience can not sleep now. None can know this more fully than Thomas Prone. And when he lets slip the reformatory hours and influences of the past few days, he becomes more and more alive to his situation. It may have been pardonable in past days to carelessly err to his injury, but now with all the light and knowledge which surround him, his mistake of unbelief and sin seems unpardonable and almost suicidal. He has come to a time when no easy apology for wounding his own heart or marring the happiness of his parents and friends is satisfactory. His sins have found him out, his friends are alarmed, and he must acknowledge to himself, at least, that dangers of almost every conceivable kind lie just across his path.

For a long time he has been more or less apprehensive that his course was a dangerous one. Now he sees it, and decides that the chances to hope for its improvement are against him. The late opportunity was gone. The door had been opened wide. The news of his sister's sickness; her death; the funeral; his mother's prayer; a tender heart; the divine spirit of God; and his half-purpose to reform, were all conducive to his

help and blessing. Never before in his wicked ways did he have such a check and such an opportunity. But his heart is measurably hardened, and he is again in the meshes of unbelief and sin. He discovers his mistake, but almost feels that it is too late to correct it. If he amends where shall he begin? Many a young man misses some golden opportunity to be good. He did. The best chances of life, for moral, commercial, and literary standing, are often saved or lost by a single step. But how sad, when this youth was surrounded by parental love and counsel; the prayers of a dying sister, the sound of which had hardly died away; and the choicest impulses of good desires in his own heart, that he should persist in the dark way. But so it was, and may his course be an effectual warning to others.

CHAPTER XX.

HIS FRIEND'S ADVICE.

In his school days Anna Doty was a classmate. She was a girl of rare brilliancy and good heart, and exerted an excellent influence over her youthful associates. Thomas admired her. He knew that soon after finishing her education she married and settled in a distant city. And although he had not forgotten her, he had lost all trace of her whereabouts. One day he unexpectedly met her on the street, but he recognized her at once. She was visiting her uncle. The meeting seemed to be a mutual pleasure. After a moment's conversation she invited him to call at her uncle's that evening. This pleased him, and he determined to go. But what should be the topic of conversation, and what account should he give of himself, was the question. He knew he would be deeply interested to learn of her home, her family, and her experience during the years since they last met. She might ask where he had been, what he had been doing, and how he had gotten on in life. And above all she would want to know about the death of Alice. He knew that he could easily

keep from her his hidden sins that had debauched and well nigh ruined him: and he was glad he could tell her that he was not intemperate but had led a sober life.

Early in the evening he called. His friend met him with a warm welcome. Mrs. Dennis had not changed much from her amiable and attractive manner as his school friend Miss Anna Doty. Her interesting conversation and inquiries soon called up the scenes and memories of other days. After a long detailed account of his sister's death, the home changes, and his last visit, matters became personal. His friend recited to him the way the Lord had led her; the good home He had given her; something of her religious experience, and her present happiness; all of which stirred his heart to its depths. In the light of this, how much of beauty and satisfaction he could see in a good life. "Why could not I have taken this course?" he said within himself. How good impulses will come to the surface when they have a chance! He really felt that he wanted to open his heart to Mrs. D. and tell her all. But this he had never done to any one, and he had not the courage to do it. She however began to see her opportunity to do good, and she applied herself with avidity to the work.

"Come, Thomas, I have given you an outline

of my experience, now tell me yours." He was ashamed to do so. "O that I had taken a right course," was the secret thought of his heart. But he ventured to tell her much of his downward career, and his repeated desires and efforts to change. She said, "You can." But he replied, "I don't see any way." "Shall I advise you?" asked his friend. "I wish you would," he replied. At the same moment he had little hope, but he was willing to listen to her advice. She advised him to write down every evil path and habit as far as he knew, and then stop at once at every dangerous turn. She urged that he immediately drop all his associates, and begin anew in every respect. Of course this looked reasonable to him, and he wanted to do it. But while it was possible it was not probable. She pleaded with him, in view of all that was good for himself in this world and another; in view of the love of parents; the respect of his friends, and, above all, the memories of his darling sister. He thanked her earnestly, and bid her good night.

CHAPTER XXI.

HIS HABITS AGAINST HIM.

He had learned by sad experience that a shuttle could as well weave without motion as a man could live without forming habits. Habits are a power, whether for good or evil ; and they are not easily acquired, neither are they easily removed. Few, however, are aware of this fact until a living experience teaches them its true character. Our young friend had carelessly allowed himself to think that all acts were incidental ; that to do a thing or not to do it was merely a matter of the moment ; that habit, whatever there might be to it, was a creature of easy control and guidance, rather than an almost unmanageable power upon the whole being. He found that the hidden steam of the engine could not generate a more uncontrollable force than could habit upon the actions of human life. Most men have to live many years before they learn this. He did not. He was told it in time to escape many of the evils of habit which now held him as with a lion's grasp. But as to the best way of living, young

men do not like to be told. They generally think they know it all. Few are willing to learn in the school of friendly advice until, like a wild horse, they are fully subdued by bitter experience.

Sometimes, as was the case with our young friend, their eyes are opened, or, at least, they are willing to open them, when it is too late to learn. He saw his condition, deplored it, but felt compelled to act upon the principle that there is always hope as long as there is life. Many a sick man has thought he was getting better when disease was exhausting his life more and more, and becoming worse and worse every hour. Of course, Thomas had a commingled hope and desire that these habits of false doctrine, unbelief, bad company, neglect of the Bible, a prayerless state, profanity, disregard of parental love and advice — of a sister's dying prayer — of his late friend's advice — procrastination, and all his combined habits that he knew were evil, would yet turn some way in his favor.

As well might he hope to create a world. Habits hold with a firm grasp. They do not change. They will turn in his favor when he turns them, and not till then. Alas, that when a man sees a habit, or a number of them, destroying him, soul and body, he does not banish them.

or tear away from them, and forever escape! Thomas might have done it long since, and might do it now; but he only fears and hopes. Satan, bent on his ruin, beguiles and leads him on.

CHAPTER XXII.

HIS LACK OF COURAGE.

Most young men lack the right kind of courage. Many have courage to do wrong, but few have courage to do right. To stand up for principles and practices, noble and true, requires mettle of a godlike character. Daniel the prophet had this. Kings, nobles, or princes could not turn him to do what he believed to be wrong. Can it be possible that our noble young friend, with all his admirable traits of character lacked this? Many of the finest young men of the country fail just here. And really, if the truth were known, this was the secret of his downfall, the very bane of his whole life. It was not so of a necessity. He allowed it to be so, perhaps from culture, permit, or careless neglect. Few men are born moral cowards. It is true that the seeds of sin and transgression are born in every man. And actual sin always brings shame; and shame cowardice, and cowardice disgrace, and disgrace ruin.

But no ship ever supplied more amply life preservers against the storm, than has our Maker furnished a safeguard to man against this impending danger. Let any youth, at the begin-

ning of early, active life, start with determined integrity for the right, and he will soon be bold as a lion. Well has God's holy record declared, "the wicked flee when no man pursueth, but the righteous are bold as a lion." The experiences of the ages has proved this a stern reality and living fact. It might have been the grand and commendable life portion of Thomas this very hour, instead of the dark time to which he has come. He feels it, and cries, "I might have escaped this!" When one gets into trouble and is sinking amid the dark breakers of sin, it is easy enough to tell what might have been done. Can not our friend, who is wrecked and so sad, teach others, and be a warning them? We hope he will, and cause many to take a different and better way than he has traveled. Every body knows that it is comparatively easy for a young man to squander a legacy of a hundred thousand dollars from a good family estate, but it is no more easy than to abuse and waste a moral heritage from noble parents.

This he had. In moneyed resources his parents were well to do, though not wealthy. But none could have a better standing in courage and moral worth. And this son had the best chance in the family. Sad, indeed, that he should throw it to the winds. Must he go down in everlasting darkness and disgrace? It looks like it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HE CAN NOT SAY NO.

How few young men learn the art of rendering decision against evil at the right time and in the right place. He had never done this. He had, at times, after taking a false step, thought, "I might have said I can not do it." But it is of little use to lock up the stable after the horse is stolen. And after-thoughts seldom help a young man in an upright life. The day Harry Miller met Thomas, ought to have been an eventful one for good in this matter. Harry had been his neighbor and schoolmate several years before, and had not been entirely ignorant of his faults and danger. He was glad they had met again. And as the turn of chance would have it, Harry had that very morning had an interview with a young man who had studied this whole matter, and concluded that the best place and time for a young man to say No is when at first tempted toward the dangerous path. This view so accorded with his own feelings that they had a long talk. He repeated it to Thomas, and told him that the correct way is not to take the first step.

"But, Harry, don't you know a young man must have some fun?"

"Yes, but it is not needful for him to put himself in the way of injury to gratify a notion of sinful pleasure."

"What is sinful pleasure?"

"It is indulging in any thoughts or actions that we are aware will harm us, yea, more, that we are aware will do injury in any way, or to any person. And when it is even suggested to us to do such things, we should say *No*, at once."

"Well, if that is true, I have missed it many a time."

"I should not be surprised; and perhaps that is one prevailing cause that has brought you where you now are. Suppose you had fixed a principle on starting in life, that you would say *No* to everything that your judgment told you was wrong."

"I wish I had."

"Of course you can see now that it would have been much better."

"Yes, Harry, I now see that it would, and really you have led me to see one of the secrets of my folly."

"Your folly? Do I understand you to admit that you have been going wrong, and are doing so now?"

"You do, and I have long been conscious of it."

"Well, Thomas, when there is confession of wrong and a desire to do better, the battle of reform is half fought."

"It may have been so with others, but it is not so with me. I have had these for a long time, but to get out of the meshes of my downward course seems almost impossible."

"Don't you think if you were tempted to-day to do what you knew was wrong you could say No, and avoid it?"

"Well, if I was tempted to murder any one, or commit a dreadful outrage, of course I could. Or, if I was urged to drink liquor (as I have never taken a glass), I suppose I could. But these have never troubled me. It is other sins, that I know are moral evils in society, that crush almost every moral principle out of me."

"Well, do you really think it is impossible to take position now?"

"I do."

"Really, do you think your case as hopeless as that?"

"Why shouldn't I think so? I have tried so often and failed. And it certainly is no use."

By this time Harry's heart was touched with the deepest pity. He feared that his friend might be hopelessly lost. And there was reason for his fear.

When a young man is first tempted to play cards, he should say *No*.

When he is first tempted to disobey his parents, he should say *No*.

When he is first enticed into company that he mistrusts is not right, he should say *No*.

When away from home and tempted to keep any plans away from his parents, he should say *No*.

When tempted to any scheme that has the semblance of gambling, he should say *No*.

When there is the slightest inclination to swear, he should say *No*.

When he is asked to neglect the Bible, he should say *No*.

When he is asked to neglect attending church, he should say *No*.

When he is asked to make Sunday a pleasure day, he should say *No*.

When asked to enter into any thing that his enlightened conscience can not approve, he should say *No*.

These and many other seemingly small matters had been entered into by Thomas, until all combined they had become like leeches on his moral nature. Now he could review much better than amend. Too late, too late! was the piercing thought of his soul.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HE SAYS YES.

“Yes” is about the first word a boy learns to use; and, without clear discrimination and wisdom, it is one of the most dangerous in boyhood days and with young men. When there is a call to give assent to any sentiment, be it right or wrong, one so dislikes to disagree with his fellows. It is usually easier to say Yes than to say No; and when one or a number of persons urge to a course of action, it is harder for one to refuse than to comply. This is emphatically true of young men, acting singly and alone or in concert. Usually they are fond of pleasing each other.

Although Thomas was regarded as a kind of leader in the starting days of life, he was quite inclined to this sort of cowardice. He could control the boys any time, and he knew it. Yet, water never ran down hill more readily than, when the boys were together, one would suggest something and all the rest, one after the other, would fall into line. This is an emphatic way of saying Yes.

There is poison in this cup, but he does not

know it now. He will learn it in days to come, and when the days are evil. Can a gin be set and there be no danger? Can a hand be put in the fire and not be burned? Can a dagger be plunged into the heart and not kill? Can a habit of evil be repeated and no harm be done? As he becomes fond of society and of pleasing his friends, he becomes more and more susceptible of this one thing. He is too easily led; and when he is asked to believe a thing, he says Yes, whether he believes it or not. So, often when he is urged to do a thing, he says Yes, and does it, even if he disapproves it, and knows that it will be to his hurt. Sometimes he says, "It is only a trifle, and will soon be among the things of the past, and will never be known in the future."

No! no! Such logic will not stand the test. This is a bad school to go to. Years roll on, and he finds it very congenial to every new-formed acquaintance to say Yes. He does it whenever it will serve his convenience. He knows all about its joys and its sorrows. Few can balance them in the true scales of warning or commendation better than he. While he is thinking of the course of his life in this respect, a young lady friend, Mary Wilson, asks:

"What is it, Thomas?"

"It is that awful word *Yes*, that has been my life's bane," he replies.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, ever since I was a boy, I have been so addicted to saying *Yes* whenever a friend wanted me to think or do as he did, that I just live to please my worldly associates."

"And you think this is wrong, do you?"

"I know that it is."

"Then, you would not advise others to do as you have done?"

"No, indeed, I would not."

"Well, Thomas, that is worth something to the world. You know that young men dislike to take advice from old men; but you are young, and perhaps you can help others to do better.

"Then, if you had a friend who was asked to go with bad boys, you would not advise him to say *Yes*?"

"No, I would not."

"If he were asked to play billiards, should he say *Yes*?"

"No."

"If he be urged to treat religious questions lightly, should he say *Yes*?"

"Never."

"If he is asked to read books of bad tendency, should he say *Yes*?"

“By no means.”

“If he should be asked to engage in business that would involve him in bad associations and habits, ought he to say Yes?”

“Certainly not. Now, Mary, I see what you are coming to. Your heart is full of good desires for my welfare, and for all over whom I have an influence. You certainly comprehend the situation; and, although you have more hope for me than I have for myself, I fully appreciate your longing desires that I endeavor, from my sad experience, if possible, to turn others from paths of sin and folly.

“Well, whether I am saved or lost, I will promise you I will do this; and, by all means, I would say to every young man, when he is called upon to enter into any scheme, or to do any thing, or believe any thing, that his own conscience and principles of right can not approve, ‘don’t say Yes, even though it may sometimes appear rude, or cost you the sacrifice of warm friendly attachment.’ Better a thousand times had I done this, and I am satisfied it will be vastly better for all my young friends whatever shall now become of me.”

CHAPTER XXV.

HIS SUNDAYS.

His views of God's commands, and a desire for independent thought and action have so perverted his ideas of goodness that Sunday has come to be a holiday to him. True, he can not rid himself of the power of early instructions, or the convictions of his better judgment about Sabbath breaking; but this does not matter much now. So many steps have been taken which never should have been, that this is of small consequence. There was a time when Sunday desecration by him was seldom engaged in; he was usually at church. The day was turned into an advantage for good. Better by far had he continued thus; but now it is his best day of profligacy and sinful folly. He dotes on some scheme of gain and wicked pastime for Sunday; it is his day of sensual gratification; it is now no uncommon thing for some gambling scheme to be on foot.

Young men are often allured into some club-room or retired place to play cards and other games; they do not intend to gamble when they begin, it is only a pastime; but one wrong step

leads to another, and so chance games are introduced. It is so with him. How changed now from the noble boy he was a while ago. It is true that little drops of water make the ocean, and so little steps and acts, good or evil, soon form a good or bad character.

It is a beautiful Sunday morning, and a few of the boys have joined him in an engagement to go over to the Corners and see Joe Burns. They know what they will do and how they will do it. Joe will have his room, some cigars, and the cards all ready. Thomas is "eager for the fray;" but in this as well as other days, conscience works. It matters not to him, if his pious father and mother are sitting in church at Darby and can not see him; if Will Jones, his converted companion, Anna Dennis, his schoolmate adviser, and Mary Wilson, who longs to see him a better young man, are all ignorant of his day of sin. God looks down into that room and sees all that is done at the Corners. Yea, conscience sleeps not, but in it, while the cards are shuffled, he visits in hallowed memory father and mother, lives over Will's calls for him to repent, and the talks with Anna and Mary about doing better. The consciences of young men are alive, and none know this better than he. As the money changes hands, first winning and then losing, he tries to throw off every

compunction of conscience—he can not do it. Few may know of that debauching Sunday, but God knows, and he knows of it, and it will bear its fruit.

How few young men realize the sad influence accruing from careless Sabbath desecration. He had no thoughts of ever reaping such a harvest from such a course. So, putting away the evil days, he multiplies these forms of dissipation. A ride with two or three couples is arranged for the next Sunday, to the village of Stony Brook. His purse is low. Although he has not been in this store but a few weeks, he manages after a good Saturday trade to take a few dollars from the drawer. Satan tells him that they will never be missed; but if the proprietor does not miss the money, Thomas will not miss the sad influence of the crime. It is only a step, but every step helps on the journey. It is a clear bright morning; the girls are ready, finely dressed and full of glee. What a contrast to the calls of divine wisdom, “remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” How could they expect any thing but cursings. They ride along, and to all appearance have not the slightest regard for the sanctity of the day. Why should they? It is not a day of any sacredness to them; they will not allow it to be. Thomas is foremost in giving a sacrilegious tone to every

step and every act. Already the pilfering of the drawer the night before is having its reckless, not to say criminal, influence. The lemonade, fine dinner, and lavish serving are freely talked of. "I guess we can have a good time once in a while," he says. It is a high day to the whole party. This is only one Sunday, yet it is something of a sample of nearly every one of the year.

Monday morning he shows signs of dissipation and exhaustion. He does not take hold of work vigorously as if he had enjoyed a day of rest; and, withal, he has some shamefacedness about something. What it is nobody knows but himself and his God. He is thinking about the money stolen from the drawer. How different in strength, health, a clear conscience, and above all, an unsullied reputation, would he have been had he been among the good and the upright.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HIS SECULAR DAYS.

Mostly they are engaged in some business capacity. Of course he has to make his living in some way. And then, to give attention to his friends and associates requires considerable money. To obtain this, he must work, steal, or gamble. Either of these ways is resorted to as best suits his convenience. Have the money he must. His clerkship affords a fair revenue, and is a cloak to cover up the income of theft and gambling. It is easily seen that he is now strongly wedded to a large circle of worldly and dissolute friends. Friends, did I say? He calls them such; and they will be steadfast in every appearance as long as he has money, and can serve them in a popular way, but no longer. This has been tested over and over again. How many a young man has been petted, coaxed, and cheered on until detected in crime. Then who stands by him? Who comforts, lifts the stain from his character, and delivers him from the snare in which he has been caught?

Amid all the cares of business Thomas is busy in planning schemes of such dissolute companion-

ship and character as must inevitably be to his hurt. Little does his employer understand the force and nature of the situation. He keeps his business hours quite well. But how easy to meet his fellows at billiards soon after the store is closed. This, he feels, is dangerous, especially in one respect: Almost all billiard rooms have a bar right along side. He has never yet, with all his sins, yielded to the sin of strong drink. But he knows that this is a stronger temptation than he can long withstand. At least he fears it. He has many times thought of this, and dreads intemperance more than all the faults of his life. He can cover up almost any other sin, but this would soon out. He would lose his situation; his name would be published in infamy as never before; his days and nights would be filled with sorrow as he never knew them, and his mother, from whom he has hid most of his course until now, would go down with a broken heart to the grave.

He changes matters a little. He induces his young friends to get up dances, parties, and gatherings, to meet and accommodate the clerks after the stores are closed. This takes finely for a time. The young people adjust matters now for a good time nearly every night. This costs money, but the boys can attend to that matter. If he lacks a little in his part, he knows the way to the

drawer; he has been there before. No student ever went through college and graduated more really than this young man is passing through a school, learning sad lessons; and to graduate in infamy.

Many a boy in business takes a different course. It is grand to see a clerk doing well, and being well commended. There is good hope for him. He intends to have a library, and saves every loose penny for this object. And while collecting it he reads it, and stores his mind with knowledge. He is bound to have a good name, and makes it. He has about him friends who are really worth having. There comes a time when the young man of this narrative understands and appreciates this. But he is left out. Despised and rejected, he is weary and sad.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HIS VIEWS OF HAPPINESS.

These were such as are common to such persons. He entertained scattered notions of happiness. But how vague, how selfish, how mistaken and unsatisfactory! They were entirely undefined, even to his own mind; and to his friends he could not even give a distinct idea that he had any aim or purpose, or any showing of steadfastness in principles of true happiness. So it is with very many people. They rely upon the incidental things of life to satisfy the moral cravings of their being. They have never learned that their Creator has made ample provision for true, constant, and complete happiness, and that men everywhere can know it. In the course of his life Thomas Prone had heard it in theory, but had never sought or accepted it as a personal experience and soul portion. No wonder he is by and by found in hell. He is going thitherward. If a man travels a certain road, what can he expect but to go to the destination to which that road leads. This must be the inevitable result. How could he expect to go to heaven when he

had been traveling in the opposite direction all his life ?

Happiness, true happiness, he could not find in the pursuits to which he was accustomed. His thoughts and belief of daily experience in happiness could not settle his heart in permanent good for himself or others. The real happiness his nature craved he failed to obtain, because of the sources from which he sought it. Catering to worldly sources that stirred up the baser passions, worldly company, the card table, the giddy dance, the unhallowed associations of evil company, the counsels of the profligate, and all that sin and sinful inclinations love, he could not hope for an upward blessing. No, no. It is folly for men to think of finding happiness when they seek it where it is not. And when a young man expects to find happy walks, happy company, and happy experiences, when he goes only in the path that ends in misery, he must expect to fail.

Thomas knew only what it was to look forth amid almost countless numbers of schemes for pleasure and gratification. Gratification, did I say? Yes. It is just that and nothing more. No real satisfaction. Worldly pleasure seekers know this. There is, in every scheme of this world, a full knowledge and experience of this. He had learned it. And he was still learning. As the

oak starting from the acorn is ever growing, and sending forth new branches to change and die; as the orchard is filled with trees of beautiful foliage and tinted leaves, and fruit attractive to the eye and sweet to the taste, only to fade, fall and decay; so he found every source of worldly pleasure, only able to charm for the hour, and utterly fail of giving lasting happiness.

There were times when he would inquire within himself, is there nothing better? Of course his better education and the godlike surroundings within his reach helped an affirmative reply.

But with all this he had plenty about him to practically spoil this conclusion. The young did it. The old did it. The foolhardy habit of coveting much wealth, embracing fine mansions, fine riding turnouts, fine possessions, much of worldly friendship, honors, fame, and indeed all that accompanies the wealth that perishes, was good in appearance to him. He did not stop to consider that, after all, this is but a source of misery as well as happiness. How easy, had he been disposed, could he have understood that one might have all these, held and viewed in a true light, and looking to the right source for full satisfaction, be supremely happy. But he saw the young people in their glee, and stumbled over

their perverted notions. Youth is the glee time of life, not necessarily sinful glee, but the good and hearty elevated life that starts one right for this world and another. This he had ample opportunity to learn, but he spurned all. He was blind to every avenue leading aright. His tastes were perverted, and his heart was set against God-given happiness.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HIS CARNAL HEART.

Of this he has no conception. Most people never think their heart is any thing but good. Many are the claims made for a good heart when there is little foundation for it. But he came in for a share in the usual stock of human nature. The guilt of the misdoings of the heart is often placed anywhere but where it should be. Wrong motives, inclinations, and purposes, are attributed to almost any thing but a bad heart. He either did not know this, or did not stop to think about it. Yet the heart works, rightly or wrongly, all the time, whether we think about it or not. A living fountain could as easily exist without sending forth its stream of water as the heart without its force of living actions. Every young man finds this true. Find fire without heat, steam without force, or wind without air, if you can; but no young man lives whose heart can not feel and do right or wrong. To this the downward course of this young man fully attested. It was this that fitted him to do just as he did in every adverse step and act. Had his heart been differ-

ently turned as he left home and entered upon the weighty duties of life, it would have been far better. He really knew no bounds to the unbridled state of a heart uncultured in good motives and actions. Hence he did what he wanted to do, if it was not a flagrant crime.

There was no check or restraint upon his wishes to do evil, save the watchful eye of human vigilance. He could hear oath after oath of profanity, see the dissolute course of comrades, enter the throng of fellows of the baser sort, learn of the downfall of companions in sin, and have full knowledge of crime about him, without its arousing his pity or disgust. What a state of heart. If asked his opinion about such things, he might say, "I would not like to do them myself," but at the same time he had too much relish for the like. Better that a young man have his heart so cultured that he utterly detests such things, than that he fall heir to millions.

There can be no question of this. And as the ore produces the metal for gold coin, so it is the heart, melted, toned, and shaped, that makes the true man. He had not this. The melting and toning he might have had, and should have had, but he had it not. This was his misfortune. Thousands and tens of thousands of young men mistake this point. The heart

may be cultured as well as the head. Yea, it should be. Every affection of the better nature should be turned into the channels of good moral culture. Usually it is not true that the narrow, the selfish, and the mean, make giants in wickedness. Many of the worst young men have hearts full of noble impulses. Nevertheless, they are carnal. Hence a need of reform. And often when reformed they make the noblest men in the world. Thomas would have made a fine specimen of virtue and manliness if he had taken the right path and kept in it. The finest ship may be wrecked by storms at sea, and the finest palace may be burned by the devouring flames; so, also, there are possibilities in the case of every noble young man of being swallowed up in the whirlpool of dissipation.

Thomas got caught, and was carried downward in the fearful eddies.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HE HEARS A MINISTER.

Seldom, while engaged as a commercial traveler, did he attend the sanctuary. It was on a fine morning as he was spending Sunday at Landers, that he was invited to church.

"I seldom go to church," he replied.

"Did you never go?" said his friend.

"Yes, when I was a boy I always went."

"Well, come; go to-day, it may do you good."

"Of course it will do me no harm; but what is the use, when I do not half believe what the ministers preach?"

"Don't you believe the Bible?"

"Yes, some of it."

"Well, perhaps the minister will say some things you can accept, that will do you good."

"I don't believe in this doctrine of hell."

"I do not wish to enter into a controversy with you, a stranger, but I confess I have ever felt it was a very dangerous thing for a young man to deny one of the cardinal doctrines of the Bible."

"Dangerous?"

"Yes, sir. What would you think of a com-

munity that had no law, or order, and how would you like to live in it?"

"I don't consider that a parallel case."

"It is exactly so, a clear illustration of God's government, and I have always noticed that when young men hold such views as you have advanced, they go astray like an unbridled horse. But we won't stop here to debate, let us go to meeting."

"Well, I generally calculate to have a good time with the boys on Sunday, but as you are so anxious and earnest I will go."

On entering the church he is given the best seat. The appearance of the minister strikes him favorably. How his very entrance into church wakes up the hallowed memories of other days. The invocation, the singing, the scripture reading, the prayer, and the preaching, all arouse the dormant energies of his soul, which have been sleeping for months.

"How great a fire a little matter kindleth." What a contrast to the debauchery of past Sundays. No cards, no revelry of drinking, no rattling of billiards, no profane oaths, no desecrating influences are here. All is hallowed, sweet, blessed. The very heart-strings are tuned in holy vibrations. His conscience is quickened. The sermon is not half through before the tear is

stealing down his cheek. Attention is fixed, and riveted upon the minister. In his heart he admires him. What he says is good, and direct, and takes hold of every emotion of his soul. Past chances of good and evil roll up before him. The benediction closes the meeting, and many stranger hands from Christian hearts are stretched toward him. A few words for his temporal welfare and good of heart are expressed, and he is invited whenever he is in town to come again. All this revives many Darby scenes. He lives over the prelude of a misspent life.

The sermon was one of those not easily shaken off. Every word, so pungently spoken, lives in his breast. He can sell goods and part with them, but he can not rid himself of this. Should the text, "Son, remember," be his portion, as seems inevitable, this sermon will add to the fuel of the fires that will torture his lost soul.

CHAPTER XXX.

HIS IMPRESSION.

Of course such scenes could not fail to set all his powers of thought in motion. The minds of young men are active; much more so than many suppose. They can not fail to think, and few have learned the measure of their memory. His mind was plastic and receptive; he grasped more of knowledge, corrective knowledge (if he chose thus to use it), from the preacher he had heard, than he thought. Another providence from the lover of his soul was wrapped up in that Sunday incident. There can be no doubt but that it was a godsend to give him one more chance. What wonders there are in the forbearance of the Heavenly Father; he wants this young man rescued; he will not let him plunge into the vortex of hell without every possible means being used to save him.

This Sunday at church deeply impressed him with good desires. It might have been fraught with the best of consequences; and really it seemed to himself that now he was again called to turn from his evil way. The moral grandeur

of divine truth never seemed so attractive to him before; the lines of darkness and light appeared drawn; no previous hour of his life had presented to him the heights and depths of a life of holiness as this one; he was lifted up in his thoughts. Never did a young man have his heart touched with more sublime impulses.

It did almost appear that the occasion had been made for him. The word preached seemed to him like "the power of God and the wisdom of God." All there was in a good life was lifted to his vision. He almost forgot for a little time that he was so far astray and on the road to the dark world. But there was indeed a turn in the road, and now he might have taken it, and ever after enjoyed that heavenly light that on that memorable day passed before his vision. He was hardly willing during the afternoon and evening to enter into desecrating scenes or company. When he met the friend on Monday morning who had led him to church, he was asked how he liked the meeting and what were his impressions?

"I liked it well. I never had a meeting do me so much good."

"Well, I am glad," said the friend.

"Yes, and your minister is a splendid preacher."

"Then you did like the sermon?"

"I did, and that part where he seemed to be so

anxious for young men, came home to my heart, it almost seemed as though every word was for me."

"Then you are not sorry you went?"

"No, indeed. It really almost upset my views on future punishment; but to tell you the truth, I never did fully doubt the doctrine."

"That's the way with most skeptics, and had you not better give up your doubts altogether, embrace the truth and escape the consequences of unbelief?"

"Well, I have been thinking about it. I am a stranger to you, but to tell you the truth, I have been a harder boy than you think."

"I mistrusted it, but you know the minister told us there was hope for the worst."

"That was what most deeply impressed my mind, and I believe I would try if I had not made so many attempts and failed."

"It is never too late to succeed, with God's help."

"I wish I had started right, or had not gone so far in the downward road."

"Well, my friend, don't give up in despair."

"I wish I could stop. But I have been thinking since you pressed me so hard on Sunday to go to church, if I am so far gone, perhaps you may

meet some others who are not so bad, that you can save by telling my experience."

"I will do all I can, but I want *you* saved, and hope while going on in your travels you may change."

"Give me your address, and if I should I will write you. Good morning sir."

How Thomas' friend did pity him as they parted! He formed a resolution to do more for young men than ever before. Balancing matters between desires and hopelessness, our Darby friend was soon again in the snare of the fowler.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HIS LAST VISIT HOME.

It had been a long time since his afflicting visit home, when Alice died. Above all other, there were two things that lived fresh in his mind day by day: Sister's death and mother's prayer. These bound the memories and love of home close to his heart. No tongue will ever tell the feelings that filled his breast as he rode over the hill and came in sight of the old Darby home. All hearts were glad at his appearance as he entered the yard. He was warmly welcomed. Wearied, he was glad to rest. His journey had been tedious and long.

He would not have all his past record known to that home circle for the world. When he sat resting in the old arm chair, surrounded by so many hearts that were glad to see the face of Thomas once more, his heart was stirred to its depths with reflections upon the past. Now and then a question and answer bring up old scenes, and this raises in his thoughts suggestive inquiries

about the future, of which he has occasion to have sad forebodings. Tea is over and the whole family circle enter into conversation for the evening. The childhood experiences, the farm work, and school days are all brought up for interest and review. The hour for worship has come. That old family Bible, so familiar to Thomas when he was a boy, is read, and prayer is offered. Thanks are given to God for preserving the son who has been so long absent, and for giving him one more visit to his friends. Good night is the word all around, and they retire.

The visiting child is given the best bed. Conscience must converse a little before he sleeps. His attention is called to what he might have been, what he ought to be, and what he is. He thinks himself to sleep.

The rest is refreshing, and the following morning is bright, and a happy day is anticipated. While the usual routine of duties are being attended to, he visits the woodshed, the stables, and all the out buildings, to look at the pigs, the hens, and the stock. He looks through the garden and the orchard. All these have an interest to him such as they can have to no other. Many a little piece of work performed by him when a boy is still seen. Breakfast and morning prayers are over. The horse and carriage are brought up,

and most of the day is spent in calling upon old friends.

Another night brings the dawn of a beautiful Sunday morning. Church and Sunday school present many marked changes. A few years have left the impress of time upon the church. The paint is dim, and signs of decay are all about the building. Almost every pew has the changes of age. There are many vacant seats either by death or removal. A good many who were boys and girls with him are now seated about the church, grown into manhood and womanhood.

The Sunday school presents a sea of new faces. His friends recognize and greet him. They can not fail to see enough of the signs of his dissipation and debauchery to arouse suspicion. It was so manifest that his friend Will, who had several years before embraced religion, feared his state as soon as he put eyes on him. He watched him all through the sermon.

Thomas had heard but one sermon since the funeral of Alice. Being a young man of large impulses, he was easily affected by the preaching of the word. Will discovered the falling tear and deep emotion. He improved his opportunity to do the visitor good. And this new word to Thomas only shows how much is done to save and bless young men who are disposed to go the

downward road. Is it not strange that they will persist? And this is an undying worm that will gnaw at their souls forever. Will was kind and faithful. He urged that he now stop his downward course, repent, and change ere he brought his parents down with sorrow to the grave.

Returning from church his mother called Thomas' attention to his sad appearance. She thought of her prayer at the time of Alice's death, and inquired if he had made no improvement. Little did she know how low he had gone. He could say but little. She feared with a mother's anxiety. When supper was over, his father took him aside and opened his heart freely. His good advantages were reviewed, his mistakes were called up, and the good advice he gave Thomas on the day he took him to Holly academy was referred to. Here again the father used every incentive in his power to bless his son. The boy listened with respect and interest; but he was too hardened to incline to the ways of good and virtue as he once did, even though his father urged it.

That night the family prayer clearly showed the labors and anxiety of the day. There were tears and sobs and ejaculations of prayer that could never be forgotten. Neither Thomas nor his parents could sleep much that night. All

passed a long night of sleepless anxiety. The morning came, the breakfast and family prayer were over, and the loved son, for whom so much had been done, and said, and felt, left home for the last time.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HIS RETURN FROM HOME.

He is not ignorant of the difference between going home and going from home. A young man of his knowledge had left home a few years before, with the brightest hopes and the greatest dangers before him. His hopes were in the best of friends, brilliant talents, and good advantages. His dangers were from bad company, dissolute habits, and demoralizing influences. The dangers swallowed him up. He was overcome. Friends were alarmed and disappointed. It seemed that a sad fate for him was inevitable. Debauchery had well nigh paralyzed his brilliant talents, and spread over his path darkness and gloom. Yet in the midst of all, he saw and felt the force of his situation; and determined to make "one honest effort" to save himself. He did it. And soon his portion was health, wealth, and happiness. His case fully proved to our Darby friend that the worst dissipation of a young man can not make his case hopeless.

None were more surprised at the absolute retrieval of this young man than Thomas Prone.

And it became a mighty incident to arrest his thoughts as he returned from home. His whole soul was moved with the idea of the "one honest effort." And at this moment, by the considerations of his own soul, his father and mother, brothers and sisters, all his friends at Darby and elsewhere, his moral worth, his influence the few days he lingers on earth, his desires for heaven, and his dread of hell, better a thousand times had he, even now, though he was in the meshes of sin, made such an effort. He knew now that it could be done. He said in his heart, "I ought to do it." Yet he lingered along the hours of his meditations in indecision. He rode alone. It was a long, weary ride. He had a grand opportunity to look over the past and the future.

As he nears the city, fond anticipations of the greetings of his friends take possession of every impulse of his nature. He thinks of the Brown boys, the Sutton family, of the Misses Langdon, and very many in whose company he delights. They are true worldly friends, but when by their associated deeds of frolic and pleasure he is led into trouble, they will not, they can not deliver. Better he had never known them. It is late when he reaches the city. Soon as practicable he is in the retirement of rest. He is alone. It is a good time to make a little thought visit to Darby ere

he sleeps. He can not entertain one thought of home other than that of blessing. He does really wish the situation about him was different. That his associates were pious young men and women, ministers and good people. This is what his heart craved. But of these he knows none. His situation is just what he has made it himself. Feeling compelled to accept things as they are, he falls asleep. In the morning he meets all the greetings he expected. The day is one of a social kind. In the evening he is waited on by a few friends and a banquet for his pleasure is proposed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SPECIAL PARTY AND FIRST GLASS.

It was in the Sutton family that the banqueting party was talked up. They were a family of large and fashionable influence. Not being besotted by intemperance, Thomas had managed to make a very good position with the more fashionable circles of the city. He was as much of a favorite with the young men and women, as he had been with the boys in school days. He had won them and they had won him. There were very many who were ready and eager to second the move of the Suttons to get up a party; a sort of reunion on his return from a long absence, for he had been on a trip of several months in commercial business, and his visit home was at the close of this trip. After arrangements had been matured to have the gathering on Thursday night, the various committees began to plan the details. It was thought first to have it at the Suttons, but accommodations for dancing seemed to forbid, therefore it was decided to hold it at Milner's Hall. Every desire was, to make it a grand affair. George Brown was appointed to confer with

Thomas and make known the wishes of his friends. He seemed quite pleased that so much honor should be bestowed upon him. Honors sometimes do a great injury. As preparations go on, the interest in the affair increases among his friends. They are determined it shall be the best thing of the kind ever held in the city. Arrangements are made for the excellent city band, the best liquors and highwines, a fine supper, and in case of a storm, plenty of carriages to bring in the guests. The invitations are quite select and numerous. Some of the people wonder that so much attention should be given to him. But they are told, "he is from one of the best families in Darby, is a fine fellow, has won for himself a host of friends, and is worthy." How many who have corrupted themselves in darkness and sin, and rendered themselves unworthy of their origin, are for a time led on in paths of respectable society.

It is a beautiful evening; the friends are in high glee; all is ready. The gathering is rapid. Nearly all who were invited have come. Thomas never looked better. He is surely the lion of the hour. It is a time of anxiety and danger to him. All the attentions of the occasion can not ward off the parental effect of his late visit home. Thoughts of home will arise in the midst of the

glee. Of course he had no hand in arranging the entertainment. For several years he had studiously withstood temptations to intemperance. Little did he think this was to be the fatal night when he would be ensnared. At an early hour the dancing began.

Soon he is introduced to the party by Miss Lizzie Sutton. He makes his bow amid the vibrations of cheerful hearts and smiling faces. It needs but a little more social intercourse for him to be ready for almost anything to please the behests of his friends. After a few rounds upon the floor it is hinted to him that refreshments are being served in the small room. Two or three couples pass in. The drinks are arranged, and Lizzie hands him the *first glass*. Of course he yields to the temptation. Sad indeed! Fatal beyond description of pen or tongue! It is but one, and once; but if he had not taken the first he never would have taken the second. Is this party to be the means of adding fuel to the already kindled flame, burning in the breast of this young man? It was not so intended. And Lizzie had not such a thought. It was designed to honor him. But is it not strange that so many choice young ladies will persist in such a thing, though they have had warning on warning of the most fearful character? The ice is broken.

And now Thomas is more than ever disheartened in thoughts to do better. It is true, he goes from that party hardly aware of his position. But ere long, in his better moments, he is aware of it. At the supper, traces of the glass were seen in his actions. Not very much, however.

At parting, all pronounce the occasion a very satisfactory one. But little do his friends mistrust the dishonor rather than honor that they have done him.

They will learn it in another day.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE NIGHT OF GAMBLING.

Thomas had much knowledge of the various schemes of gambling. He had given attention to this matter. His surroundings had been such as to lead him this way. In public and private he had learned the ropes of chance games. But there was not one honest impression in his heart that gambling was a good thing. With sympathy, earnestness, and interest he had entered into the occasions of this evil. Not a horse-race, a match ball game, a faro bank, a prop table, cards, poker, or any other way or opportunity where men put up their money, but that had his apparent attention. By word or act he had often given them his assent. Of course, in the main, he would cover this up to public gaze. No gambler really likes to be known as such. Retreats of seclusion are always sought for this profession when it is possible. This sin can not bear the light. He knew it had the universal condemnation of God and man. Although he gave it his sympathy, he was not an expert. He only entered into it because there were times when it was very fascinating,

and he had committed himself to this way. Light and darkness were thus strewn in his pathway. He had not been taught in early life that this was right. No, no! Every thought of his knowledge was against it. It was only by acquired habits and associations that he had fallen into line with gamblers.

Of course he knew the objections, and, while he indulged, every dictate of his better judgment condemned it. He had learned that it wrought evil, and only evil, continually. His friend Aaron Rounds had met his fate in the state prison by it, and the event of his temptation, his crime, and incarceration were fresh in his mind. He remembered how he called at Elder Darwin's (a Presbyterian elder) to see the girls one evening, and was led astray. Although the girls were members of the church, they had indulged too much in doubtful games to have a good Christian influence.

Aaron was a fine young man of good moral influence and integrity. They invited him to a social game of cards. He declined, saying he knew nothing about the game. They taught him. He played and liked it. Soon he became an expert, and was enticed to gamble. While trying his hand with some sharpers one day, he lost all. Not fancying the "beat," he was tempted to take some money from the post office, try again,

retrieve the loss, replace the stolen money, and all would be well. He lost again, was detected in his crime, and sent to prison for a term of years. This was Thomas' friend. He knew all about him, his course, and its effects; and every act of his own gambling caused trembling for himself. Yet he had become so fascinated with it that to desist seemed very difficult.

Many of his friends visited the Band House club-room. He was told that on Saturday night the boys would meet there and have a good time. He knew well what the "good time" meant. In closing up his employment with the commercial house he had quite a little sum of money coming to him. This made his financial situation easy for the present. But alas! gamblers never know how long they will have enough to pay their bills. He thought of losing and gaining; but the temptation was great, and, indeed, it would not do for him to "go back on the invitation of the boys."

It is about nine o'clock when he goes in and finds quite a large number of his comrades. Already the money is going up and down. He takes his seat as a witness of the chance lines. He sees the winning and losing. His money begins to burn on his finger ends to make a "haul." Gamblers usually think only of winning when

they put up their money. He puts up about a quarter of what he possesses, and wins. He tries again and wins. Then he stops. The drinks are then taken. He takes lemonade. He has never drunk anything stronger, only at the party. Now an hour passes as he watches the course and fortunes of others. Again he tries his hand, and wins a large amount. It is truly tempting his confidence with certainty; and really he almost fancies that he will "win the pile from the boys" and go home with a small fortune. After another hour he tries and wins again. Every emotion is excited at his good luck. The drinks are in order again. Now it is strong drink. His second glass. Sad! but in keeping with his downward course. Frenzied and excited by strong drink and ill-gotten gains, as he approaches the table he cries out: "I'll bet all I've got with any man on the board." The bet is taken—he loses, and his last cent is gone. How disappointed and disheartened! He sits back with a look of angry disgust.

Of course, he don't treat any more, but at the next drinking he cares little what he takes. As a few more hours pass on, he lingers to see the gains; but he has little interest.

Going to his bed friendless (the dissolute have but few friends when they have no money) and penniless, he feels like becoming a suicide. To

think that many others have trod this path before him does not mitigate his misery much. And to think of home and its calls only stings like an adder. He can hardly hope for reform, but wishes he had done very differently.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HUNTING A SITUATION.

All through his dreamy sleep during the remainder of the night, his mind is filled with thoughts about living, how to pay his way, get board, clothes, and money for necessary expenses. He feels that he is down, down, clear down in the straits of destitution. He is ashamed to make known his condition. The only alternative is to hunt a situation. But where, to whom, and how shall he go? The place he recently occupied is filled. He knows of no other. But the greatest difficulty in his way is his dissolute character. Some know it. And if every body doesn't know it, he does. And he feels keenly the weight of his unfitness to be employed and trusted. There comes a time when the guilt of every untrustworthy young man stings like an adder. This was his case. He could not easily pass over his long accumulated habits of dishonesty, bad company, and utter unfitness to be trusted in any employment. It must be, then, with shamefacedness that he would seek a situation, at the hands

of any firm. He waits a little, as he staggers under the debaucheries of the past night.

A few days pass, and he feels that he must act. He applies to Mr. Johnson, the hardware merchant. Of course the usual questions are asked. As well could he spend a term in the state prison without disgrace as could a young man expect to get employment with a respectable firm without a good showing of character. He feels this most deeply. Mr. Johnson calls for his references and other credentials. He really had none, but put on as good an appearance as possible. He was determined to succeed by any conceivable representation. But how hard it is to plead for a place, while every word and emotion are affected by hidden knowledge of entire unworthiness. His pilfering from the money drawer, his Sabbath desecration, his dishonesty, and all the debaucheries of the past few days roll up before him. His heart sinks within him, and he despairs as he is told that this firm does not wish to employ him. After attempts in several other houses he realizes his condition of penury and want, and even of disgrace, as never before.

The morning dawns upon him after another sad, sleepless night, and he meets Robert Fulsom, an old friend of several years' standing. With the usual greeting he says:

"Good morning, Thomas."

"Good morning, Robert, how are you this morning?"

"Fine; how are you?"

"Well, I don't get along very well. I really don't know what I am going to do."

"What is the matter?"

"You know I lost all my money when we met at the Band House club-room the other night, and I can not get a situation."

"Well, Thomas, I can tell you of a place; I just heard that Johnson, the hardware merchant, wants a clerk."

"I know that, and have spent two hours there this morning, trying to get him to take me on a fair salary, and he don't want me. I suspect that he thinks I am a pretty hard boy."

"Well, I do not see why business men should give the cold shoulder to a fellow, if he don't walk in an awfully strait jacket, when he behaves himself and is faithful in business hours."

"Yes, but Robert, you can not make them think so. They want good steady hands to attend to their business. And I have been thinking that if I had taken a different course it would have been better for me. No boy ever had a better chance than I when I left home. I wish I had never gone in such company, and gambled. I tell you,

it don't help a young man any, and it has about ruined me."

"But there must be some place where you can get in, and get enough to pay your board, any way, for awhile."

"Do you know of any place where there would be the slightest prospect?"

"Would you be willing to work as a day laborer?"

"Yes, until I could find something else."

"Well, I think Squire Estey would set you to work on the mill-dam for a few days."

The work was hard, and he got only seventy-five cents a day. It was a great change for him, but it would keep him from starving and give him a good time for reflection.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

NEW DESIRES.

The most hardened character is often deeply susceptible of the keenest desires for goodness and virtue. The degraded home, the lowest dens of vice, the direct experience of debauchery, and the darkness of prison walls, all attest this fact. The mistakes of literary, domestic, commercial, political, and religious life all tell the same story upon this point. To wish one had done right in the past, and to want to pursue a right path in the future, is the common experience of intelligent men. There is rarely an exception to this. Then the question arises, why not? Why does the whisky seller go on in his traffic; why does the drunkard continue to get drunk; why does the profane man swear; why does the Sabbath-breaker keep on desecrating; why does the gambler gamble; why does the liar lie; why does the dishonest man cheat; why does the neglecter of his soul go on neglecting? Simply because temptation is very powerful and human nature is weak.

If Thomas had properly regarded his good

desires of heart and sought the help he had been taught was ample, and thus ceased to yield to temptation, he would long since have had a good instead of a bad character, a bright instead of a dark path. But he is not lost yet to desires for good, and wishes to escape the snares that are fast entwining themselves around him. The surroundings of his menial employment are more calculated to awaken thoughts of amendment, than to lead him down in the slippery paths of sin. There are no such temptations here as he has been accustomed to. This situation can but inspire him with at least desires for a nobler life. He sees at a glance that had he taken advantage of his best chances this would not have been his lot to-day. A good business, many friends of worth, perchance a happy family about him, and fine prospects would have strewn his path with roses. These scenes loom up before him.

Do they affect him? Yes.

Do they stir his heart with regrets? Yes.

Does he see where he has missed it? Yes.

Does he have any hopes of amending? Some.

Has he any interest in others? He wishes they would not do as he has done.

Do his desires for good strengthen? They do.

This is but another experience in the long line of his hopes and fears, his safety or his ruin; but

it is very much like a young man in the wiles of a sinful course. Yet purpose and not desire is the grand lever to lift up a young man from the pit. All the desires of a lifetime could not do for him the work of a true purpose. He desires to be true. He desires to be honest. He desires to keep good company. He desires to be respected. He desires to be industrious. He desires to stop drinking. He desires to return to attendance at church. He desires to respect and please his parents. He desires to accumulate wealth. He desires to shun his bad companions. He desires to have a right heart and life. Can he have all these? Yes.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HIS LADY FRIEND.

Agnes Long was a girl of rare gifts and graces. She was a native of Wales, but her parents had left their country, journeyed far, and moved into the town of Bolton while she was but a tender child. They were of the most substantial character, and had aimed at the most careful and thorough training of Agnes. No pains had been spared to give her a good education. She was not only capable of gracing the most refined literary and respectable home, but she did it. Day by day she acquitted herself well in the duties of home. She delighted so to do. Just after her eighteenth birthday she united with the Congregational Church in Bolton. This added to her moral strength of character and fitness to enter the responsibilities of life. She had many attentions from her friends, young and old. They confided in her. The more she went into society the more she was admired. While she was neat and attractive in all her appearance, she was rather a plain sort of a girl. Yet every discerning mind readily understood her great worth.

She had never been from home very far, or long at a time. Now she desired to go to the city and visit her cousins. She had never been in the city before. Mr. Robert Fulsom, who assisted Thomas to a job on the mill-dam, was her uncle. She reached his house on Friday, expecting to make a visit of a week or two. Her bright blue eyes and long curls were quite attractive to the Fulsoms. Her choice conversation, which indicated culture of mind and much intelligence for one of her years, really excited their esteem and admiration. They became proud of their country cousin. Agnes seemed deeply interested in their fine city home.

On Saturday, her cousins, William and Lucy, invited her to walk out to the park. She was greatly pleased with the fine walks, beautiful foliage, and the cooling fountains. Sunday morning she was invited to go with the family to church. The city congregation seemed very different from the one she was wont to attend at home. Yet she was interested and blessed.

In the afternoon Thomas called to see his friend Robert. He felt very differently from what he did when he was in the commercial business. The mill-dam work had been quite humbling to his pride. He was invited to sit in the parlor with the family. Soon Agnes and Lucy came in,

and he was introduced to Agnes. She was retired and unassuming in her manners. Yet she entered somewhat into conversation. Thomas was pleased with her gentle and attractive appearance, and he had discernment enough to detect much intelligence by the few words she spoke.

Nothing was farther from their thoughts than that they should ever have more than a passing acquaintance. But on returning to his work Monday morning he finds in his thoughts that her blue eyes, beautiful ringlets hanging over her well-formed shoulders, her lady-like appearance, as well as culture of mind, had touched a spring in his heart. Daily through the week he thought of his newly-found friend. Could this be mutual? Of course he did not know it, and she did not know it. His habits of personal appearance had never been loose, and he was capable of making a fine showing in dress and conversation. Sunday afternoon he was in his best trim if he did come from shoveling dirt at the mill-dam Saturday night.

Agnes, like many an unsuspecting country girl, seemed to think that all the young men of the city must be of the "first water," because they lived in the city. Poor girl! how little did she know that much of wrong and sin are covered up by good clothes and pleasant conversation!

She had been unconsciously led to feel an interest in Mr. Prone by the Sunday afternoon call.

In his meditations through the week he formed no purposes for a decidedly better life. But he did think seriously of many things. He thought of his dangers from strong drink, yet apprehended little trouble from that quarter, as he had tasted drink but a few times. He considered in some degree his habits and manner of life, and thought he had better change. Saturday night brought a letter from his mother. It was a good one. That evening he spent alone in his room. One hour at least was employed in thinking of his life, Agnes, and the future. Sunday afternoon he called at the Fulsoms' again. And to his eye Agnes seemed more charming than the week before. Subsequent events proved this mutual. A little quiet, private conversation informed him that she would return home on Tuesday. He had thought that if he had a good lady correspondent it might help and shield him from temptation. And possibly it might be better for him to choose a wife.

She consented to a friendly correspondence. Soon after her return home, she seemed to have special interest at the post office. The Monday following, a strange letter came into the family, addressed in a gentleman's hand-writing—a

stranger's hand. Her interest to devour the contents could be easily detected as she broke the seal. The impression passed through the family that Agnes had got a beau during her visit to the city. Is it true that in her pure, gentle heart she is falling in love with a worthless, dissolute fellow, a gambler, a Sabbath breaker, and a debauchee? Is it true that her parents, sisters, and brothers are being flattered with hope that she has become interested in some good young man? They incline to think she has, and rather hope so.

The letter is answered. The die is cast. And Agnes Long has taken pure and honest steps that a few years later she would gladly retrace. The correspondence is not hurried. Thomas never thinks of her only to admire her more and more. His occasional letters add to her fancy for him. When the Fulsoms conversed about him in her presence, they spoke of him as connected in some way with a business house. She supposed he was clerk or book-keeper. Mistaken young lady! Her letters to him are of the choicest kind—womanly, kind, affectionate, and of excellent influence in every line. They really win his confidence and love. He reciprocates as far as his state will allow. And, while he does not let go the hands of old associates, he

does desire a worthy life. The several months he works at the mill-dam are those of trial to him. He feels the force of what seems to him a humbling situation. He watches for a chance to change as soon as practicable; and from a quarter he little expects a door was opened for a situation to labor in a dry-goods house. A visit to Bolton about the time he quit work on the mill-dam and began in the store, gave brighter prospects.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A RAY OF HOPE.

How true it is that when a young man is deeply enlisted in ruinous habits of sin, he often "comes to himself." A new acquaintance with some worthy young lady seems to his imaginary fancy to change the whole theater of his life. Sin is laid aside, repented of, refrained from, forgotten. Good comes. A new character is formed. Reputation is soon established, and respectability is won in all hearts. Prayer, faith, and hope spring up in the soul. Are these possibilities? Can they become stern realities? They may and may not. Visions are often delusive. With the youth, buoyant hopes are often dashed to the ground for want of a true purpose. Many an honest motive has attempted to build up a hope of good on visionary desires. This is false. As well might a house stand built on a sand-hill. The failure was for want of heart consecration and determination, firm as a rock. There can be no doubt of the success of any young man in rising from the lowest stages of a fallen life when a ray of

hope is presented, if he will seize and hold his opportunity.

Thomas could have done this. He could have done it with or without acquainting Agnes of his past life, present state and temptations, had he been willing to take her hand and press forward to the prize. She stretched out a hand of purity, love, wisdom, and help to him. He called for it, won it, but did not hold it. Her letters were fraught with the best of influence. They really did him good. Often while perusing them he would feel an attachment to her on the one hand, and an unworthiness on the other. Yet he hoped. He knew he was unworthy of her, but hoping matters would amend under her good influence, he continued to write as good letters as he could, and received hers. The clanging chains of evil habits hold him down. He does love the society of the wicked and the profane. This can not be disguised. It holds him strongly. He knows its baneful influence and threatening aspects. At times he inclines to break the intelligence to Agnes, that he is not what she supposes, and, perchance, drop the correspondence. He dreads this. Yet he thinks should he do so it might possibly open the way for her to do a work of blessing. He hesitates. But incidentally an opportunity offers for him to make another

visit to Bolton. He now concludes that he will go and make a full statement to Agnes of his life, condition, and desires.

It was a pleasant day when he got off the stage and rung the bell for Agnes. She appeared in a beautiful dress, with a sweet and radiant smile that betokened large hope for his troubled heart. More than ever he discovered in her a large womanly loveliness. She was all that she appeared to be, and even more. Not so much could be said of him. But his hope was that the Agnes he had learned to love might be the means of saving him for this world and another. Can a young man expect a young lady friend, a bride, or a wife, to save him if he will not give up bad habits or shun bad company? No. It is impossible. The visit was pleasant, yea, more, it was delightful to the unsuspecting Agnes. Thomas failed in his attempt. He could not open his heart to Agnes. During the meditation of his ride on returning to the city he did not fully despair. A few days after he called at Fulsom's. He had not been there for quite a while. They gave him a warm welcome. They had learned that he had written their cousin Agnes a letter, but did not mistrust that they had formed such attachments to each other. They were quite well acquainted with the course of life Thomas had

pursued, and while they had strong friendly attachments to him, they felt it might be a very serious matter for him to become intimate with their cousin Agnes Long, and especially by their introduction.

Thomas sought a private interview with Robert, and opened his heart fully and freely to him.

"Do you really love the girl?" asked Robert.

"I do," answered Thomas, with much heart emotion.

"And do you think she loves you?"

"I know she does. And, Robert, you know what a life I have lived, and that I am unworthy of such a girl."

"Yes; but if you choose you can do better, and, perhaps, you had better try."

"Try. Bless you, I have tried enough to save forty young men in the downward road, if that would do it, and, indeed, I went over to Bolton to see Agnes the other day, fully intending to tell her all and ask her to help me be a good man, but my heart failed me."

"Well now, Thomas, this is all nonsense. You can get right and be what you ought to be if you will. I could do it if I got down where you are. I know I could. It is true I have not gone as far as you. The night I met you at the club-room I only went in to look on. But I tell you, Thomas,

you had better write to Agnes, and tell her just how you stand. I know she will help you."

Thomas did so. Agnes read the letter with much pain, but candid consideration. It did not cool the ardor of her love. Her reply was gentle, lovely, wise, decisive. He felt that he could reciprocate. What a chance. And what a source of happiness to himself, his friends, and the world, had he made it so.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

HIS LAST CHANCE.

Every well has a bottom, every sea has a bed, and it is a long road that has no end. The months and years of dissolute habits of this young man have all had their vital significance and tendency to a fearful end. The weight of a vacillating, wavering life is upon him. While his desires are good as ever, his habit of delay to reform has grown stronger and stronger. The object of his love sets herself with all her heart at the task of saving and blessing him. She assures him of her love and firm devotion to his life's happiness, and urges by all the strength of prayer and words, that he at once take a decided stand for reform, that he quit his evil associates and habits, form good associations, and start at once on a new road.

It is true, that to all human appearance, if the love of father and mother, and the many dear friends God has given him, can not induce him to change, there is little hope of what others might do. Yet Agnes is not without hope, and Thomas does not despair. If he is saved, however, the proper means must be employed. He

must be willing, yea, determined to accept the means, and receive the blessing. Whatever of attempt and failure there may have been in the past; whatever of means and measures may have been used for his rescue heretofore, there is certainly a good chance now. God is ready, God's son is waiting, the Holy Spirit is calling, the memories and prayers of loved parents still linger for him, sisters and brothers, some on earth, and some in heaven, still whisper saving words in his soul; the unforgotten advice of dear friends yet impresses him with almost irresistible force, and Agnes Long, loving and being loved, is chosen to dart these constraining powers into the depths of his moral nature. Her oft repeated letters seek to faithfully do this work. It is a work which an angel might well covet. She feels that it is a mission her divine Master has put upon her. Thomas is deeply impressed that an unseen hand has guided Agnes to him and him to her. He feels that his ardent desires, so long cherished by night and by day, may yet be realized. "Is it possible," he often asks himself, "that now I am to be led out into a life of goodness, such as I should have entered several years ago?" The future looks brighter to him than for a long time. His good wishes and purposes increase. Daily he hopes for better days. But, alas! the

worm is still eating at the vitals of his moral nature.

Has he quit Sabbath-breaking? No.

Has he ceased profanity? No.

Has he left off keeping bad company? No.

Has he entirely quit intemperance? No.

Has he stopped gambling? No.

When the good letters of Agnes came he would resolve to improve, and would somewhat cease from the evil things to which he was accustomed—stop doing wrong by degrees. Could he succeed? As well might a traveler expect to reach the right end of his journey when once in the wrong road, without stopping, turning squarely about, and getting into the right road.

In the midst of his hopes and fears he chanced to meet Robert Fulsom, who said:

“Well, my friend, have you got right with Agnes?”

“I followed your advice.”

“Did you?”

“Yes; and she felt it keenly, but seems to be attached to me more than ever.”

“I tell you, Thomas, she is a splendid girl.”

“I think so, and the letters she writes me are just grand. They are full of good advice.”

“Well, Thomas, you will do a good thing if you get that girl.”

"I am convinced of that."

"Have you made up your mind to reform and prove yourself worthy?"

"I think I will."

"Well, it is the best thing you can do."

"I have been thinking if I don't, it is my last chance."

He felt this, and his next letter informed Agnes of his anticipated visit to Bolton. Her reply was fraught with the deepest interest and the largest consequences. He anticipated much from the visit. He had many friends who were warmly attached to him. When he was invited to the club-room, he thought he would go once more, and then quit altogether. He was honest. But this "once more" is the downfall of many a choice young man. It was a few evenings before his visit to Agnes. The visit was very enjoyable every way, and their engagement in marriage seemed to give him a new lease of life. He had gifts and traits of character to fulfil every promise of the hour. In his heart he had a true purpose. And to carry out this would have given lasting happiness to the beautiful and gifted Agnes. She wanted this and he wanted it. But purposes not only need to be professed but lived.

CHAPTER XL.

HIS OCCASIONAL GLASS.

His daily pathway was as full of temptation as ever. No class are more beset with temptations, and none are more susceptible of temptations, than young men. It is a marvel that Thomas had so long withstood the temptations of intemperance to the extent he had. Besides the drinking at the ovation party he never drank but a few times. Yet this is no assurance that he may not some time be branded with intemperance. He had for a long time been addicted to the use of tobacco. He smoked and chewed. He had never dreamed that this habit was the handmaid of intemperance. He had hardly thought that nearly all drinking men are given to this filthy habit, and that it surely helps on in the downward course. That it was filthy, inconvenient, and expensive he had at times believed. And it was doing its part of the work that was slowly but surely leading him on to destruction. If a young man smokes he will often find himself with smokers; if he is treated once in a while to cigars, he must occasionally treat others; it is but a step from this to strong

drink. As the chain is made up of many little links, so every little step that does not improve the man, must do the opposite.

A letter from Agnes was received just as he was to go on a social ride with two of his gentlemen friends. He read it hastily and with interest. Its advice was to shun his former company. He at first thought that he would excuse himself and not go. But he had not courage for this. He said, "It will do no harm to go along if I am only civil." So has many a young man said, in taking a wrong step. When they decided to return by the way of the Corners, he feared he might fall in with some old friends, and that it might be to his injury. And true enough, they stopped at the very place where he had some time ago spent the Sabbath in debauchery and gambling. He was warmly greeted by his old friends. His comrades and himself were invited to tarry a few hours. They declined and said they must hasten back to the city. "Well then, gentlemen, you must have something to cheer you on. We've got some of the best old rye you ever drank." These boys had fallen strongly to drinking since Thomas spent the memorable Sabbath at the Corners. Agnes' letter stared him in the face. All the good impulses of his nature aroused his intention to lead a better life. He had no thought that he

would fail in this way. How seldom do young men carry out good purposes while they keep bad company. The glasses were passed around, and he declined. This surprised the friends who had taken him to ride.

"What does this mean, Thomas?" said one.

"I never did drink much, and I have made up my mind to quit altogether."

"Well, I heard you had fallen in love with a girl up at Bolton, and that she was changing you. Is it so?"

"I think I will give up drinking entirely, any way."

"Well, if you must do that, just join us once more here, and then quit."

"Of course that can't kill me," he said. This was another step. His purpose of heart and pledge to Agnes was again broken.

Going home his comrades told him it was all foolishness to be so strait-laced about such little matters. An occasional glass never hurt any body, and he had better enjoy such little privileges while he could, and it would do no harm. They had an influence. They called on him the next evening for a social hour at cards. The games were quite enjoyable. It was common for the boys going out to take along a bottle. After playing for a time it was passed around, they

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repeating what they had said the day before, that an occasional drink could do no harm. He yielded again and accepted the situation of intemperance on that line. Once committed, together with continued alliance to his old companions, what could he expect from such a position?

With the shame, the subtlety, and the deceptive shrewdness of drinkers, he was able, for a while, to just take an occasional glass. But when the adder repeats his stings the poison is sure to take effect sooner or later. He followed it in social circles, then kept a bottle in the store, and by and by was bold enough to visit the saloon. Of course this was not very difficult just after his evening game of billiards. He fully intended to give up billiards entirely; but how could he do it when he would not give up billiard company? And holding with a strong hand the dissolute companions that had been his bane so many years, it would take more than the wise, loving letters of Agnes and a visit to Bolton occasionally to rescue him from the snare of irretrievable ruin.

CHAPTER XLI.

HIS REPUTATION GONE.

If there is anything in this world to be sought, won, and prized, it is a good reputation. And this is worth more than rubies to a young man. Indeed, what would life be worth to him without it? Show me a young man whose reputation is gone, and who realizes the sad fact, and I will show you a young man whose life is a blank, whose death must be in the darkest shades, and whose eternity will be forever amid the pitfalls of untold sorrow. Sad indeed must be the memories of such. Everywhere it is within the grasp of a young man to go up or down; "to save his life or to lose it;" to live to do good or to do evil, just as he chooses.

There was not a day during the life of Thomas after he came to years of understanding, when he did not apprehend this most vital and significant matter of his moral character. This is almost invariably the case with young men. Hence so much is done to cover up sin. Why the screens and painted glass which hide the revels and debaucheries of the saloon; why so much hiding

away in secret places for cards and gambling; why does shamefacedness so often put the young man to the blush the first time he enters a billiard room; why has attending horse-races at county fairs, associating in base-ball clubs and kindred practices come so much to be dreaded, and continually looked upon with suspicion by all classes? Because there some of the brightest hopes are blasted, and many a promising reputation is sadly blackened for this world and another. Here the watchful demon waits for his unsuspecting prey.

Must our young friend who left his fine home in Darby a few years ago, with a record that any young man might be proud of, go down in oblivious night? Where is that reputation so well formed, so hopeful, so charming to his friends, so promising to himself? Let the associations of bad company; the Sabbath desecrations at the Corners and other places, the broken resolutions to do better, the unheeded pleadings and prayers of a pious mother, and the abused and rejected counsels of many loved friends answer this, not unanswerable question. They can tell.

Prospects for wealth, happiness, good friends, and friendship, a name worth having in any community, and a home snug, true, and delightful; all these are gone. He realizes the fallacy of trying longer to attempt to maintain a position of

worthiness and goodness. A wrecked reputation forbids it. He has feared this, but hoped to avoid it. The time has come when his worst fears are realized. He deeply feels that there is not a ray of hope for better days. It is indeed dark. There is not a single person to whom he can look to even mend his wrecked character. He feels that both God and man frown upon him. Of course there is some truth in the adage, that "there is always hope as long as there is life," but his days, and months, and years of sin will not permit him to believe this.

The tone of his letters to Agnes, his conduct at the store, his intercourse with his friends, and the downcast countenance, all betoken that his character hangs at least by a brittle thread. He has many friends, it is true, who would be glad to think differently. But they have watched his course too long and seen too many mistakes to hope. His employer even is becoming suspicious that he is not worthy or trusty. And he does not know of a single worldly or business man to whom he can look for favor. Of Christian men he knows none to help him. For years he has neither sought their acquaintance or influence. He staggers under the load. Days and nights are long and dark. And every time he flies to his cup to drown his trouble it does not

help the matter. It is very evident that his hopes for life and his standing with his friends are nothing like what they once were. No one thinks or speaks of him with care or cheer. Even those who have helped to lower him down, step by step, fail to give him influence or respect. And the few who had hoped to restore his reputation begin to despair.

CHAPTER XLII.

HIS REVIEW OF MISTAKES.

Mistakes are mistakes. Sometimes they can be corrected, and sometimes they cannot. Often they are very serious, even fatal, and often they are not. Better a thousand times, in a usual sense, to avoid them. And with care, wisdom, and good drilling they can be avoided. There was scarcely one but that Thomas might have escaped if he would. His opportunities had been almost remarkable. Few boys have better. And in his review he understands this. But now it seems too late; and so it is. It would take a miracle to turn back the wheels of his fortune—or, we should say, misfortune—and let him journey his pathway over again.

The week has been dreary and sad to him. The heavy load of misspent years is too much for his oppressed mind and shattered condition. He can hardly perform store duties. Closing up on Saturday night, his cup is sufficient to overcome his sorrows for a time. Sunday dawns upon him to behold his sorrow, as he pores over the days, months, and years of the past.

He remembers the fine Darby home, fraught with the best of influences and most promising blessings to start him out in the world, and sees it was his own folly that he did not accept the situation and improve upon their rich legacy. He reviews his mistake in yielding to the *professed* Christians who enticed him to play his first game of cards, and thinks he should have said *No*. It is a matter of the greatest regret to him that he foolishly treated the family altar lightly. It is painful to him to think how he treated with neglect his mother's kind words when he left home for Holly academy, and memorable are the wise words of advice his father gave him during his day's ride to the academy. He mourns that he did not put them into immediate and continual practice. His school days he reviews with no little interest, and concludes that his great mistake then was that he turned away from the students' prayer meeting and took other company. How much better it would have been had he taken the right stand here! That Sunday ride—the first one—while at school, he feels was his first real step in Sabbath desecration. He regrets it.

In neglecting to answer the questions of his mother's letters he sees he did wrong, and says, "O that I had opened my heart fully, and kept

hold of my dear mother's hand!" He calls up the time of revival in Darby, when his school-mate, Henry Arnold, who had been converted, urged him to be a Christian. He is sorry, and thinks that was a golden moment when he might have taken a path to shun the dreadful throes of anguish through which he is now passing. He sadly remembers the time when he considered matters of religion somewhat, attacked the Bible as not a divine book, and imbibed false doctrines. This he considers one of the saddest mistakes of his life. He keenly feels that it is much easier to learn than to unlearn. Starting in life aimless, no real purpose, position, profession, or belief in view, he understands now has been a bane in his life. He says to himself, "How much better had I considered, decided, and started with a good end before me! I should not have been here." He is now thoroughly convinced that reading infidel books has injured him, and that it is better to let them alone.

And how much he deplored his wrong position when in the drug store at Brown's Station! He contended he had a right to spend his time in dissipation out of business hours if he chose to do so. By persistency in this he lost his situation. He now sees that this was really the first step in business matters that wrecked him for

life. And how bitterly he weeps as he reviews the death and funeral of Alice, and his mother's prayer. Tender in heart and strong in desires, he feels that then he might have turned his course. But now — this sad, sad hour! — "O, what a mistake!" he says. He thinks of the visit with Anna Doty, his old schoolmate, now Mrs. Duncan, when he visited her at her uncle's; and the kind and earnest words she spoke to him, urging him to change his sinful course, lest it bring him to a bad end. "O!" he exclaims, "my pathway has been filled with angels of mercies to stop me in this fearful career. Would God I had heeded their voice!"

And now he reflects upon his wild, reckless course the Sunday he gambled at the Corners, and how he stole money from the store drawer to pay the expenses of the Sunday ride to Stony Brook. He breathes with a heavy sigh as he thinks of these dark pages of his experience. He lingers around the opportunity afforded when he heard the minister when he was a commercial traveler. It was a good time to change, and he wishes he had. His last visit home is memorable. All was done to bless him that could be done. It was an unpardonable mistake in him — yea, will prove his eternal folly, that he did not change at that time, but rather took up on

his return with the company of the Suttons and Langdons and others, who led him into intemperance. He cries out from the depths of this lone chamber, "Would that I had done differently!" O, that bitter wail! And here he looks over his rapid downward steps—the dark night at the Band House club-room, his destitution, desires to reform, his God-sent angel Agnes to save him, and the despair that filled his soul while drinking at the Corners during the ride with his two friends. The dark picture of that Sunday morning, as he reviews the mistakes and misused opportunities of his short life, no tongue can describe. And the cup of his sorrow runs over still more as he thinks of the pangs that must soon pierce the hearts of his dear Agnes and his parents, unless some change can be effected, of which he has no hope.

CHAPTER XLIII.

TOO LATE.

Was it barely a visionary notion of the brain, wrecked and tortured by the follies of sin, that led Thomas to say "Too late?" No; there was too much reason for it. And, indeed, his case did bear the imprint of hopelessness. There is a saying that "There is always hope as long as there is life." He knew this. But his repeated efforts to amend forbade his thinking that this would fit his case. He saw nothing but dark shades of despair.

After the Sunday of review, when he felt the weight of his situation, as in no previous day of his life, he returned to the store in deep distress. He felt, he knew, that the end was near. On Sunday he attempted to write to Agnes. He could not. He had hitherto been able to write her with faint hope, but he could do so no longer. His downcast countenance all through his routine of store duties told the sad tale of his desponding heart. Really he would be glad to find a friend to whom he could unbosom his feelings. He could think of none. He almost

contemplated suicide. Every possible point in which he might discover a ray of hope was examined. He found none. "Too late" was still the ringing language of his heart. It seemed as if he would give worlds, did he command them, to change his situation. No man or body of men could have made him believe a few years ago that he would ever come to this.

But so it is, and the situation seems unalterably fixed. Is it not strange that so many young men will not believe the dangers of their pathway, when so many who have just passed over it, warn them? The very nature of the case compelled this young man to the conclusion that all was irretrievably lost. Every impulse of his nature convinced him that there was naught for him but the forebodings of a lost soul. Already the fires of remorse are kindling in all the avenues of his moral nature. To let go a single sin seems utterly impossible. The excitements of business, responsible cares, and earnest desires to extricate himself fail to give his troubled heart one soothing touch. Gladly would he now effectually hear the kind words of a loving mother, but it is too late; gladly would he heed the counsels of father, sisters, brothers, and friends, but it is "too late;" gladly would he have now shunned the nights of gam-

bling, the card parties, the nights of dancing, the intemperance and debauchery, and evil habits through which he has passed, but it is "too late;" gladly would he recall the blessed opportunities of improvement to elevate his character to happiness, but it is now "too late."

Above all he thinks of the good resolutions and fine chance he had, in forming acquaintance with Agnes, to reform. But all is failure, and it is now "*too late.*" And how his heart sinks within him as he feels gathering over him the gloom of his condition. His once strong bodily frame is shattered, his nerves are tremulous, and his appetite burns for strong drink, and all these things admonish him of the fearful wretchedness which must soon surely befall him. The fears of his friends are fast being realized.

CHAPTER XLIV.

HIS UTTER WRETCHEDNESS.

His letters home and to Agnes say that he is ill. This is all they can say. But more is feared. The reality of his sad condition is traced in every line of his short letters. Although he has not asked her to come, his aged mother soon starts to visit her son, over whom she had spent so many days and nights of anxiety. She had hardly expected to find him so far gone. On her arrival she is at once told that "he is in a wretched condition of body and mind. That during the night his brain was burning with fever, and that now he is in a high state of delirium." What pangs fill her breast as she enters the room. He knows her, and as he grasps a mother's hand, she cries with a bitter wail, "Is this my loved boy, who left home a few years ago so fair and bright?" From a shattered frame, a crushed heart, and delirious brain he bursts forth with bitter weeping. She reads at once on every line of his countenance his position. She sees what he has been and what he has come to. He pleads that he never intended to come to this. He wrings his hands and wishes

he had never been born. His dear mother's heart is pierced with pain.

But it is time for action. She at once determines to do all possible to save his life, and if this can not be done, to comfort him, and prepare him to die. She consults the physician. The father, and sisters, and brothers are sent for. Robert Fulsom called to see him, and for the first time his mother learned that her son was engaged in marriage to Agnes Long. This added a new pang to her sorrows. She asked Thomas about it, at the same time telling him of his dangerous condition. She found that he loved Agnes dearly in spite of his wayward course. The doctor showed great interest in Thomas, and gave him the best treatment possible. Arrangements were made for the best of care. Every hour there were the strongest exhibitions of a mother's tender love. He talks considerably of Agnes, and at times cries out, "O that I had kept my promise to her, to stop my sinful course and do better!" Many of his friends, the very ones who led him down, inquire after him with the greatest solicitude; they pity him in his wretched state, and wish he could recover. It would seem that they could not but review their steps of folly with this young man.

Just at evening his father and sister arrive.

Other members of the family will come the next day. No tongue can tell the deep emotions of that father's heart as he enters the room, and his tearful eyes look upon his dear son of so much prayer, love, and counsel, but now amid the groans of a form shattered by dissolute habits, and whose sun was going down in darkness just as he was to enter the mature years of manhood. He can not speak. The anxious sister bends over him with the kiss of her love. She does not utter a word. Thomas, sinking under the load, is keenly sensible of his situation, and out of his crushed heart exclaims, "The sense of my folly is greater than I can bear!"

Agnes arrives on the first train in the morning, and when he learns of her coming, he bursts into the wailings of a crushed heart. She is calm and composed, yet the silent tear and sorrow of countenance told plainly that her heart was crushed at the very thought of looking in the face of one who had won her love as no other ever had. That is a dreadful moment as she stands by the side of his bed and holds his hand. All that she has sought to avert is before her as an avalanche of stern reality. "May God have mercy on my dear one," is her prayer. Thomas sinks amid his unutterable wails of heart, and it is feared he will not rally again. Soon he recovers

a little, and opens his eyes once more upon her bright eye and beautiful face. His sad end is approaching, and the doctor requests them to prepare for the worst. His parents are completely crushed with a sense of his state. They could bear his death by fever or accident, but this is unbearable. They cry to God from the depths of their hearts to have mercy on their boy, and sustain them in this dreadful hour of trial.

CHAPTER XLV.

HIS DOOM.

The minister, Rev. Mr. Bowman, is sent for. He comes. He is a man of gentle but decided character. His manner is soothing and attractive. He sees at once that there is work for his faith, prayers, and words of consolation. Thomas is glad to see him. He realizes that he must soon die, and without hope. He listens for a moment to what the minister says, and then, burning with delirium and frantic with a keen sense of his condition, as if the demons of the pit had him in their grasp, he wails forth a bitter cry, "*I'm lost!*" This stirs the tenderest emotions of all around his bed. It is heart-rending. The ejaculations of prayer, which go up to God for mercy upon him, are indescribable.

How dark the scene. How untold the agony of Agnes, parents, sisters, and brothers, as they stand around the bed and close his eyes in death. — Never to be forgotten scene. — He is gone. — Thomas Prone, of Darby, is gone forever. No ray of hope is left behind. Memories of his life and death will stand over his grave as monuments

of his folly, while "the mourners go about the streets."

The coffin is brought and preparations are at once made to remove the body to Darby for the funeral. When the message reaches the neighbors of his boyhood home, great sadness goes from house to house. All that possibly can be is quickly done in making ready for the funeral. The pastor, who preached on the occasion of Alice's death, prepares as best he can for the solemn services. But how different the scenes, the thoughts, the tears, and the lessons of this dark hour. All is dark. No hope. The whole community for miles around are there. The meeting house is crowded, and many are without. Occasionally, since he left home, some hint has been given of his downward course. Yet few have suspected the realities of the sad tale that the last day or two has gone sweeping through the neighborhood, and has brought the crowds together to mourn as they never did before. How impressive the scene as that vast concourse pass by the coffin and read:

THOMAS PRONE.

AGED 29.

The friends enter into earnest sympathy with the deeply afflicted family. No previous funeral occasion ever witnessed so many tears and heart

sorrows. The procession is very long; and the army of young men who follow him to the grave, firmly purpose that they will not follow his sinful footsteps.

CHAPTER XLVI.

YOUNG MAN, HEAR, HEED.

The beginning and closing of the career of Thomas Prone appeals to you. His bright beginning points to your happy prospects, and his sad end says to you, *beware*. Many a young man from all the different grades, impulses, habits, and stations of society will glide his eyes over the pages of this book. But the writer would not for a moment even suppose that all young men incline to such shame and folly. Yet many do. And all are more or less in danger of the snare of the fowler. True it is that many are caught before they are aware of it. And the sole object I have in giving to the young men of our land the sad tale of the life and death of Thomas Prone, is to arrest attention and shield many from ultimate ruin.

You are, my young friend, unsuspecting now, and will you listen? You must know that in the activities of young men, they are constantly alive to the pleasures and attractions of the world. And in these they enter into every conceivable

form of virtue and vice. Some aim firmly at good moral manhood; others at a brilliant education, while still others have little care for good morals or education, but carelessly pass into sin. And some fully understand every wrong step, but say they can stop whenever they please. And then there are a class who determine to do right but constantly hold the hand of evil associations. To which class do you belong? You have seen the pathway so full of pitfalls and moral death into which this choice, good designing young man went. Will you shun it? Don't say, "I am in no danger." This very thing has been the ruin of many a young man. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." The enemy of your whole life and soul is watching for you as with an eagle's eye. He plots your destruction. Do you believe it? Are you a young man of good home, parentage, opportunities, and prospects? Then don't disappoint yourself or others. Do not enter or travel the wrong path. So far as the dangers are concerned take just the opposite of the young friend of this narrative. Are you a young man without home, parents, or friends to guide and sustain you? Then decide at once upon a life of uprightness. Determine with purpose as fixed as the laws of the Medes and Persians, that you will lay hold upon every means

possible to this end. Heed the warnings of this book.

Are you a young man who has already taken position of true character for earth and heaven? Let eternal vigilance be written on your banner. Your success and ultimate victory will require this. Do you think because several years have passed and you have not been molested by the arch deceiver that you are secure in the refuge of moral security? Remember that many a battle has been lost just as victory was thought to be won. Courage and wisdom will be the price of your victorious warfare.

I would not press to your heart undue pleadings. No, no. I am aware that the pride of a young man can not be touched quicker than to even suggest a suspicious word about his moral integrity. Young men like to be thought well of whether they are worthy or not. They consider their character as the apple of their eye. Good or bad, they are sensitive to the touch, concerning its upholdings. And never since the world was made, was this more so than it is to-day! and this, too, when so many characters of high standing are tarnished with sin. Even moral character is weighed in the pools of gambling. Every conceivable device is resorted to, to ensnare our best youth. Young man, hear, heed! Brains, eye,

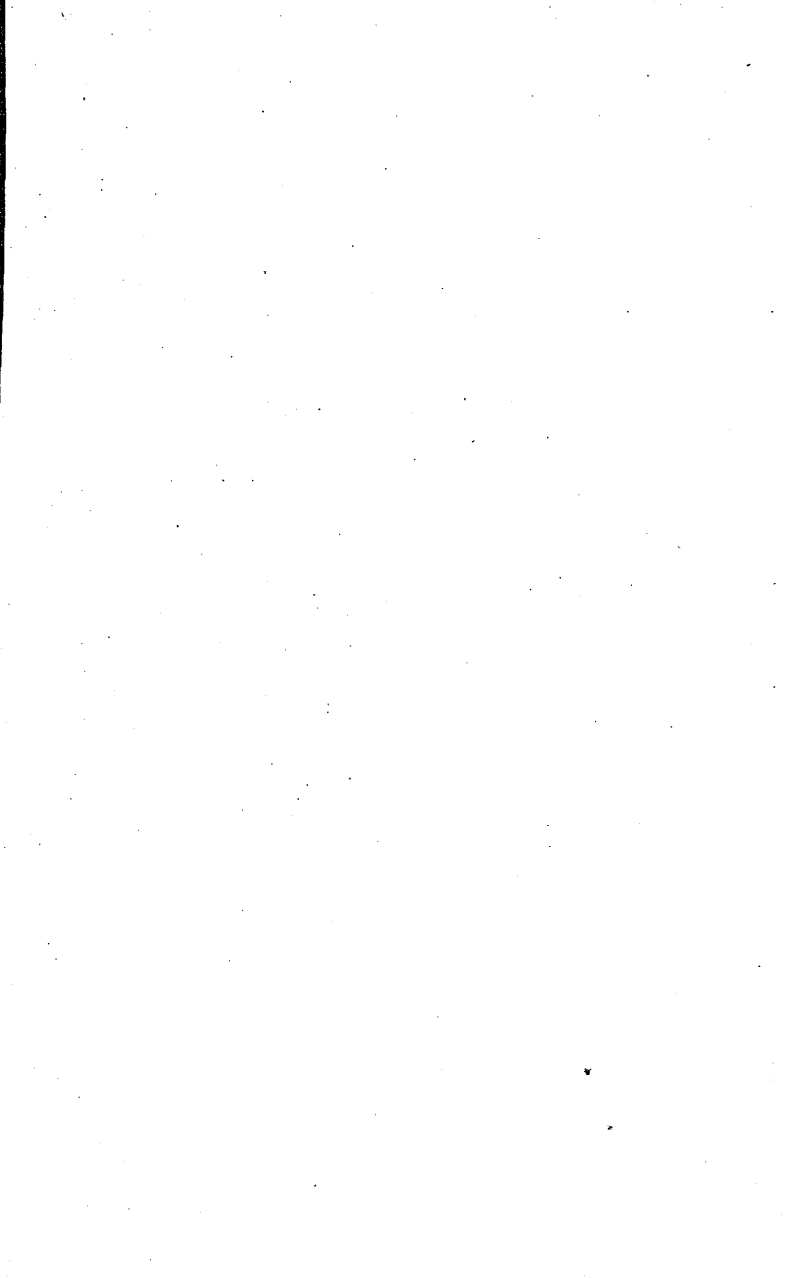
ear, heart, hand, and foot you may now put under contribution to save yourself. God will help you; the Holy Spirit will help you; Jesus Christ will help you; and all good men and women will help you to stand in the hour of the strongest temptation.

Remember that Satan's beguilings not only flaunt themselves in places crude and low, in profane babblings, intemperance, cards, gambling with many games, dissolute company, harlotry in dark places, and the most fearful debauchery, but also in high places of professional honor and respectability. Even here not a few young men take their first unsuspecting steps in wrong doing. You, my friend, can not be too careful in choosing your society, watching every avenue of influence, and deciding rightly every position you shall take. Even the smallest things are of the greatest importance in tracing the steps of a young man. If this be true in others tracing his steps, it is certainly true in his taking them. Do not understand me to urge you to put on the mask of solemnity and a hideous appearance over your youthful face, that should be smiling with love, beneficence, and attractiveness. No young man should be willing to be repulsive. Winning manners, winning words, and winning influence, should go far in making up the inventory of his

good possessions. If he will, he may constantly have a mine of wealth in the storehouse of his moral resources. If you will have this, and use it daily in some form as a felt power to bless others, it will go far as a shield of defense. Such is the nature of your very being that you must be busy, and you will be very likely to do good or evil. Such is life. Then cast a reviewing eye over the pages you have just read, and beware; be helped, shun the temptations of the evil way, be guided, and see to it that your journey be not in the winter—in the cold blasts of doubtful actions and still more doubtful results; but go in helpful brightness for the world you live in. Don't choose the opposite.

An artist begged the privilege of painting the picture of a more than ordinarily beautiful boy. Its rare loveliness attracted the attention of every beholder. Seldom is such an object found to paint from, and seldom is a picture of such rare excellence seen. Days, weeks, and months pass on, while persons of distinction and honor become interested in its beauties. The press and social circle discuss its merits. Now and then some one is heard to say, "I would like to have seen him when he became a man." Years roll on, and one day the painter, looking upon it as it graced the walls of his studio, said to himself "I wish

I could find a contrast of face to put by its side." For this he hunted earnestly and long. Alms-houses, asylums for the insane and the inebriate, low places of vice where are seen the worst grades of debauchery, prisons, and courts were visited. He entered the cell of a murderer. The distorted, crime-stained countenance before him made him shudder. He inquired of the history and life of the incarcerated victim of crime. To his astonishment he found his lovely, innocent boy-face and the one before him the same. Young man, you see the possibilities for blackness and the possibilities for brightness. Which will you choose?



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